

Kenade Suzutsuki

涼月奏

「スバルの王のお嬢様、
今後は専断者になる」

「私は好きよ、こんな面持ちと
共犯関係、退屈しないんだもの」

Kureha Sakamachi

坂町紅羽

近次郎の妹、兄と格闘技が大好き。

「あたしの兄さんを返せえ——」

Kinjiro Sakamachi

坂町近次郎

主人公、ある体質に悩まされている。

「おまえ……女の子なのかい？」

「スバルはどうしてもお嬢様の執事で
いなくちゃいけないんだ……」

Subaru Konoe

近衛スバル

男爵の美少女、執事として
働に仕えていた。

どきどき！

Chapter 1: Butler-kun's Secret

Konoe Subaru, a name quite possibly every single student here at Private Rouran Academy knows. From doing well in arts and sports to an attractive face and figure, all the way to being absolutely unparalleled in looks and a genius in everything, if he was a girl, he'd probably knock-out every single male student here at this school—To briefly sum it up, he's got insane looks.

He's an enviable student, with perfect grades on top of that. There's the term 'Unattainable Flower', but Konoe would be a single rose blooming at the top of the Mt. Everest. Have I mentioned his nickname, 'Subaru-sama', already? The girls call him like this out of admiration and love, the boys out of spite and driven by their jealousy. From an average human being's point of view, namely mine, he doesn't feel like he's the same species as me.

However, now's not the time to be surprised just yet. What's absolutely unbelievable is that guy's profession...He's a **butler**. That's right, a butler. Konoe Subaru's occupation is undoubtedly a butler.

.....Well, you know. When I heard about it the first time, I also doubted my ears. A butler? Wazzat. Are you serious? Some occupation like that exists in today's day and age? Not to mention that he's still attending school as a normal student. Is he like a gift from the heavens to show us humans that we're not worth anything?

That was pretty much my first reaction when I heard about Konoe. That's right, everyone feels the same way at first. A butler is just that type of an endangered species, it's unbelievable. However, that scenery is enough proof. Once you see Konoe address his classmate Suzutsuki Kanade as 'Young Lady', you can only accept and believe this kind of wild tale.

Damn it, I'm jealous. So friggin jealous. He's already popular with the girls, and as if that wasn't enough, he's **that** Suzutsuki Kanade's butler? How could I not look at him with a gaze full of envy? Can you blame me, I'm living my high school student life in loneliness

and boredom, the rosy atmosphere of love exchanged with a grey and dull fog, no interesting event in sight. Of course, it's not that I don't like girls, or swing **that** way either.

It's just, because of my disposition—Because of something out of my control, and entirely thanks to my vexing body, I just cannot get any closer to women, and have trouble dealing with them. That's pretty much why Konoe Subaru is just that dazzling of a human being to look at. I'm sure that I probably won't even have anything to do with that guy for the rest of my student life.

Even when I moved up to become a second-year, and Konoe Subaru became my actual classmate, I had no doubt in my mind. That's right—up until I opened that door.

♀ × ♂

“—Ah.”

I was careless. Because I didn't pay attention for a second, that's all. The entrance ceremony had happened around a week ago, and today was just any other afternoon after classes had finished for the day. When I opened up a single cabin in the boys' toilet without knocking, someone had already preoccupied it.

I was greeted by a slender, delicate physique like it had been hand-crafted. The uniform on their body was different from the average student, looking much more luxurious. Their haircut consisting of their graceful hair bound up behind their head, they possessed facial features beautiful enough to rival an antique doll. And, this appearance resembling an art piece was painfully familiar to me.

“...Konoe Subaru?”

Out of reflex, I blurted out that name. This is bad. What is going on? He must have forgotten to lock the door, I bet. As I suddenly opened the door, Kone was inside, blinking at me in confusion, his mouth opening and closing in shock.



At least he didn't scream, seriously. Although classes were already over, a few peeps might be left at the school. I have no way of knowing what an outsider might assume seeing this situation. Not to mention that it's that Subaru-sama. Rumours say there's some Konoe Fanclub growing here at Rouran Academy, and with every club, there's a few extremists in there, swearing that they would drown any person doing evil by Subaru-sama at Tokyo Bay.

What if one of those guys happened to witness this scene? I'd get executed on the spot. I'd be put on a witch trail, burned at stake. Compared to that, this situation right now isn't as bad. Basically, I just have to apologize. Ahaha, sorry about that, I just accidentally opened the door. Had no bad intentions, you know...Yeah, just say that with a light tone, and pretend like nothing happened.

Sounds good, time to execute. I'll break through this silence, and have the frozen hands of the clock move again!

"A-Ahaha, sorry about that, I-I just accidentally opened the door..."

Because of me being as nervous as during a presentation, my mouth wouldn't move properly. Feeling awkward, I tried to pull my eyes away, which just so happened to drift towards Konoe's thighs. Damn, they sure are charming for being a boy's, alright. His skin was as white as porcelain. He was probably right about to pull down his pants. Although not consciously, my gaze was just glued to this beauty.

—However.

"...Hm?"

For a moment, I felt like I saw something I should not have. Now hold up, why is this guy wearing this weird underwear? How do I say this...the shape is just odd. It almost looks...like girls' underwear...

"—!"

My thoughts stopped there. Like my life depended on it, I slammed the door shut. Luckily, Konoe showed no particular reaction. He might still be shocked for all I know. I mean, I get it. Seeing that was pretty shocking for myself.

I left the toilet behind me, and washed my hand at the nearest sink. Since I didn't even get to finish my business, there might be no need to really wash my hands, but I didn't even have 1mg of needed composure to care about that.

A cat. It was an adorable cat. Underwear with a lovable cat character printed onto it. Also, that delta shape...

“No, calm down.”

That can't be the case. I took off my glasses, and rubbed my eyes. If what I had seen just now wasn't just my eyes playing pranks on me, or some hallucination, then my glasses must be off. However, can the strength of my glasses suddenly get worse like that? Wait, why did I even go to the toilet in the first place?

That had to have been because of the kimchi¹ I ate for breakfast. That damn Kureha, just perfectly ignoring the expiry date like it's nothing. She covered it up by saying that my lucky color today was red, but I don't believe that...Wait, that's not even important right now. The problem—Yes, the big problem is...

“Why was Konoe...wearing panties?”

Even though I had seen it with my own eyes, it was hard to believe. I mean, we're talking about Konoe...that Konoe Subaru. It's true that he looks awfully like—no, he's even cuter than your average girl, but there shouldn't be any need to wear panties still. Or, what? Is it some kind of tradition in his family that men wear female underwear, or they'll get cursed?

“...Yeah, as if. Like that's a thing.”

But then, what was that? My thoughts were in a jumbled mess, trying to keep up with this rush of information. Subaru-sama, toilet, panties, cat, meow, meow, meow...My thoughts were running rampant. My skull was about to burst with all these keywords—And then, a revelation resembling divine intervention popped up in my head.

“...!” I subconsciously clapped my hands together.

...What, it's simple now that I think about it. Ahh, I'm such an idiot. Why did I not come up with that? There's always only one truth. And, it's so simple—He's a pervert. That's right, Konoe Subaru's fetish is to wear women's clothing.

“.....”

No, calm down, Sakamachi Kinjiro. Reconsider that train of thought. It's that Subaru-sama we're talking about. There's no way he'd tick

like that.

“...But, you know.”

That’s the only solution I could come up with. Konoe Subaru must be experiencing some kind of positive stimulus or excitement from wearing female clothing, getting off of that. Why else would he be wearing those panties?

“...How could this happen? Subaru-sama is a pervert?”

Met with this astonishing reality, my head turned blank. All I know is that I need to take this to the grave. What if this information is leaked? Most girls would probably lose their will to live, becoming delinquents, and in the worst case, the homeroom teacher would feel guilty and even hang themselves. On top of that, it’s not my business to judge other people’s interests. I want to respect his privacy. Everybody has their own secrets. That’s right...I’m not an exception.

I pulled close the faucet, and stopped the water supply. Time to head home. The shock must have made me forget about the stomach ache I got from the kimchi. I should just take this as a sign and go home, eat dinner, take a bath, and sleep...Forget about everything I’ve seen today, yep. With that determination in mind, I started walking down the hallway—

“—You saw, right?”

I heard an alto voice a bit too high for a boy. As the setting sun shone into the hallway from the window, no other people were around me—except a single person, colored with a calm orange shade.

“Jirou...Sakamachi Kinjirou. That was supposed to be your name, right.”

The doll with the voice of a soothing bell—Konoe Subaru called out my name. He sounded displeased and disgruntled, but his expression was calm and inoffensive. This is Konoe’s usual default. At the very least, he sees me as a classmate. However, compared to his master Suzutsuki, he pretty much treats everyone coldly. It’s like no other human besides his master existed.

Doesn't help that a lot of pressure can be found in his voice and gaze. For some reason, many girls in our class think of this as 'Cool and awesome', screaming in excitement and all, but I really couldn't agree with that right now.

...I'll be killed. At this rate, I'm dead meat. I don't know why, but this feeling just filled my head.

"If you plan on staying quiet, then I will ask you one more time."

Silence seemed to have been a bad choice, as Konoe slowly opened his lips, which resembled flower petals.

"You—saw my underwear, right?"

Splash, raging waves of the cold Japanese sea splashed at the beach of my heart. What is this...Scary. It's especially terrifying because what he's saying sounds so stupid. What about my lucky color being red? I feel like it's off-mark way too much...

"U-Um...What might you be talking about? I-I-I didn't see anything?"

I blurted out a white lie. I mean, do you really expect me to say 'Yes, I sure saw that. I perfectly did. Your underwear's pretty cute, huh?', you know? No way, it's like I'd be breakdancing on top of a minefield.

"Huh, so you saw it, but act like you didn't, I see." His tone sounded as indifferent as always.

You're on. Now that it's come to this, I'll continue playing the dumb guy. No matter how much East Germany-esque torture you might throw my way, my silence won't break. I'll show you my unwavering resistance in the face of absolute authority!

"Just give up. You saw it perfectly, right? You burned that sight into your eyes, didn't you. You purposefully opened that door so that you could see my underwear, I know it."

"Like hell I did! Who would want to see your underwear! I'm an adult! Why would I be interested in underwear with character imprints!"

“.....So sorry for that? But, how do you know about the pattern of my underwear? I thought you didn’t see anything?”

“.....”

I messed up! It was a leading question!

“C-Calm down! It was just a sudden impulse!”

“Quiet, pervert. You have no more human rights.”

“As if! I didn’t look at your underwear because I wanted to!”

“Oh? So, you’re saying that the incident just now was an accident?”

“Of course! I was shocked to see you wear such adorable panties, my eyes just were fixated on them!”

“...Enough, I get it. I fully understand what kind of human being you are.” Konoe glared at me.

Urk, what a gaze that is. It’s a cold glare like he was looking at a sex offender. Damn it, what are you saying I did wrong here...!

“Shit! You only say what you want! If I’m a pervert, then you’re an absolute deviant! You’re wearing female underwear for—”

There, I grew silent. Or rather, I was forced to shut my mouth. Without any warning at all, Konoe sent out his right fist, stealing the air out of my lungs.

“Guha!?”

A blow stung directly into my body. Because of his fist ramming right into a vital spot, my body folded into a < shape—This is bad. It’ll come out. Everything inside my stomach will forcefully be summoned at this rate.

Right after moving up a student year, I’m about to vomit all over the hallway. What kind of punishment is this? I don’t want to start a new student term with that kind of bullshit! I swallowed down my desire and urge to let it all out, and got my breathing under control.

“...I’m shocked. Even at the very least, that one was supposed to render you unconsciousness, strong enough to make you vomit blood. Well done on surviving that one.”

“....”

You bastard. Don’t just do that to your friendly classmate. Oh right, I heard a rumour saying that Konoe was trained in the art of self-defence, as a means to protect his master. Yeah, that one definitely aimed for my vitals. However, thanks to certain circumstances with my family, I’ve been trained in receiving these kinds of attacks ever since I was five. I know this isn’t something to brag about, but I have a pretty sturdy and strong body.

“Can’t help it. I guess I have to get serious.”

“Eh?”

“Just to let you know, but that punch just now was only half of my strength.”

“.....Are you some battle manga protagonist? Also, why is there even any need to punch me?”

“Hmpf, that should be obvious. You learned about my secret. I need to erase this problem.

“Wha?”

The heck is up with that? Am I going to die? Am I going to get killed because I saw some panties?

“There’s no need to be scared. I’m not going to erase your life, just your memories. There’s a method of erasing memories, having been passed down in my family for generations.”

“W-What’s up with that...Don’t scare me. But, what kind of method is that?”

“Punching you.”

“—Wat?”

“Did you not hear me? I’m going to punch you. I’ll continue beating you until you forget everything you saw. That is a butler’s memory erasing technique.”

“I’ll die! You’ll definitely erase my life with that! Also, what does that have to do with being a butler!?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll end it quickly. Once you wake up, you’ll be safe and sound, on a hospital bed. Then, you’ll ask yourself ‘Huh? Where am I’, and everything will be dealt with. Happy end, right?”

“My ass! I’d be a cripple! All my precious memories of my past 16 years of living will be reset to nothingness!”

“No need to be scared, I’ll visit you two times a month. No presents, of course.”

“At least bring me something! Is that how much you care about someone you yourself turned into a cripple!?”

“Hm, alright then. I’ll bring you some porn magazines. What do you like, MILFs?”

“Now you even have misconceptions about my interests...!”

“...What? So...even older than that? Phew, I didn’t think my classmate would be such a hero. Alright, I’ll continue to spread your legend, so you just rest in peace, okay, Silver Killer!”

“Don’t give me such a shitty nicknaaaaaame!”

With a clatter, I heard the image of Konoe Subaru inside of my head break into a thousand pieces. This guy’s crazy. He might have a cute face, but deep inside, he’s a lost cause. What do I do about this? Even if I told him that I would keep this a secret, I doubt the current Konoe would even bother listening to me. That being said, being lynched is no option either.

“...Alright, bring it on.” I stretched my back, and slowly stood up.

Konoe must have felt that something about me changed, because he let out a faint ‘Huh’.

“What, do you plan on resisting?”

“Of course, I’m not too fond of pain, you know. That’s why, I’ll at least try my best to fight back.”

“—I like that determination. You piqued my interest, Silver Killer!”

“...Seriously, at least drop that nickname.”

With that, Konoe formed a fist, and took a fighting posture after taking a backstep, creating distance between us. He was telling me to come at him. I felt pressure and killing intent creeping along my skin. Answering this determination, I took a step forward—That’s right, I was taking a step forward in the opposite direction.

“Wha—”

That instant, I heard a faint breath, filled with confusion and shock. However, it was already too late. My body had already turned, and started running. Escape, that’s all I was doing. Might not look like it, but I actually have confidence in the speed of my legs when it comes to running away.

“B-Bastard! You dare run away!?” I heard Konoe’s voice behind my back.

He seemed to be confused for sure.

“Sorry about this, but I really don’t like pain!” I screamed, and ran down the empty hallway at full speed.

Dash, dash, dash. Run to where he can’t follow me anymore. A place where he can’t hurt me. And then, I’ll calmly think about how to save my own life.

“Like hell I would let you run away!”

Eek, he’s really chasing me now. I heard his footsteps approaching, and the pressure slowly reaching me. I’m feeling like the resistance during the Second World War, the thrill is making my heart race.

“Man up and fight! If you do that, I’ll be gentle and finish you off in

one hit!”

“You call that gentle!? Also, don’t tell me to man up when you have such a girly face!”

“N-Now you said it! You said something you shouldn’t have, alright!? Stop moving! I’ll slice you up in two seconds, Silver Killer!”

“How many more times do I have to tell you to drop that nickname!”

Immense pressure made my back muscles tense up. He’s fast. It felt like I was being chased by a wolf. We’re on the second floor right now, so I technically can escape to the first floor, but the stairs are dangerous. He’ll definitely jump down and leap at me. If that’s the case, then...!

I ignored the stairs, and instead leaped into a nearby classroom. I was greeted with the strong smell of chemicals. This is the science room. It’s not that I purposefully chose this room, but it should be enough to lock myself up in. I quickly closed the door, and locked it while I was at it. Alright, all I have to do is block off the door so that he definitely can’t open it, and jump out of the window. Ah, perfect timing, I spotted a human model (I think his name was Johny). Perfect timing, I’ll use this to block the—

Bang! Right as I wanted to grab the model, I heard an explosive noise reverberate inside the science room. Being assaulted by a horribly bad premonition, I turned towards the source of the noise, only to find the door gliding through the air. Konoe forcefully kicked it open.

“Waaaaah!?”

I dodged the door flying towards me, and saw the organs of the human model fall to the ground. Crap, the colon and liver got destroyed.

“Caught you.”

Walking on the peach-colored small intestine, the butler stepped into the science room. What kind of surreal situation is this? Damn it, no more chances, huh. I don’t like using violence towards that cutesy face, but Konoe is still a guy. I don’t need to hold back.

I grabbed the leg of the human model on the ground, and lifted it up. Alright, this is a batting center. I'm aiming for the home run. Don't get any prize, but I'll swing it like my life depends on it!

"Uraaaaah!"

I charged a full swing with the human model. From an outsider's perspective, people might think I'm crazy, but this is the best I can do. The head part of the human model cut through the air, aiming at Konoe—

"Don't underestimate me!"

An angry roar rang out, followed by a flash. Konoe's right straight fist beautifully blasted off the model's head. The freshly severed head broke through the glass of the window, and fell out into the open.

"W-Wah!?"

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa, it's a heaaaaaaaaaad!"

I heard shrieks from a boy and girl coming from the hallway. It seems like a lovey-dovey couple on their way home was greeted with that head. It must be like they waltzed right into a never-ending hell, but I couldn't be bothered with that right now.

...Ahh, this sucks. I can't back down any more than this. I better make up my mind now. I mentally grit my teeth, and slowly form a fist, raising my arms so that I can protect my head. I'm experienced in this, this style fits me best. I'm not a complete amateur, alright.

"So you're finally motivated?"

As if to answer my determination, Konoe took a fighting stance himself. His gaze was sharp enough to stab into my skin. Finally, as if to announce the beginning of our fight, his mouth opened, and his lips moved.

"This time, I'll properly deal with you. I'll be using my 'Butler Knuckle' just for you."

"..."

Damn, that sounds pretty lame. What's that even supposed to mean? You just titled it literally. I thought he'd actually have a cool name for once.

"Not like I care, but you really have no naming sense at all, huh."

"Wha...What are you saying! It's cool, right!? Look, Butler Knuckle!"

"No, it's hella lame."

When I gave him my honest impression, Konoe howled with a beet red face. Is he...embarrassed?

"Urk...this is the first time I was ever humiliated. I won't ever forgive you. You will get my certain-kill technique."

"Certain-kill technique?"

"That's right...I named it 'End of Earth'!"

"That is some scale you ramped up, alright!"

You're gonna destroy earth? Wouldn't you die as well?

"Yeah, your names are kinda off, not gonna lie."

"S-Shut up! Don't be stingy about my names!"

"...Sorry. My fault. You were probably trying really hard to come up with that name, right?"

"Wha...Why are you looking down on me! Don't treat me like some idiot!"

Damn it...I thought it was so cool...I was thinking about it for an entire week—said Konoe, as he pouted like a small child...Excuse me, but...This guy's so cute. His current behaviour creates a gap to his usual stoic attitude, and it's really playing with my heart—N-No, stop. If I go any further than this, I'll jump up the stairway to adulthood. Of course, on a route different from the average person. I definitely want to avoid that fate...!

I got my breathing under control, and changed my train of thought. It's been a while since I got into a fight like this. And because I was thinking that, my heart started to beat faster.

“_____”

Pressure filled the science room. I heard my own breathing much more clearly, and felt the core of my body cool down. The air grew tense, and in the midst of that—I closed the distance between us so that I would get the first strike, when...I realized. The shelf next to Konoe must have lost its balance because of our exchange before, because a large glass beaker was about to fall down any second.

Konoe himself clearly didn't realize. Probably because of the angle he stood at. Finally, like a thread had been cut, the beaker naturally fell down—

“Dodge!”

Reflexively, my body moved. Because of my sudden outburst, Konoe's mouth was half-open, utterly shocked. He still hasn't realized!? At this rate—it'll hit him. That glass will fall directly on his head—

“Shit!”

Please, make it in time. With these prayers in mind, I pushed down Konoe with all my strength. I felt an impact, followed by the sound of glass breaking. Turning around, shards of glass were scattered across the floor, right behind us. Damn, that was way too close for comfort. Realizing that we avoided this danger, I sighed in relief—

“Urk...”

I heard a groan beneath me. Looking down, I spotted Konoe, pushed onto the ground by myself. I felt worried that he might be hurt somewhere, so I tried to move away from him, but—In that exact moment, my heart froze up. Konoe beneath me—possessed a slender body like a doll, a well-built outline, and eyes like crystals...Crap, what kind of cute living being am I looking at right now?

On top of that, a sweet scent drifted up towards my nose. Despite him being a boy, it could melt my brain cells. This softness inside my

palm, with a fair amount of elasticity, like it was swallowing my hand—

“...Huh?”

No, hold on a second. Isn't this softness a bit too much? Out of curiosity, I moved my fingers along Konoe's spongy left chest... Weird, so very weird. Why—does he have breasts, despite being a man.

“Kyaaaaaaaaa!?” Konoe raised a shriek high enough to be a girl's.

At the same time, I was met with an iron fist.

“Gueah!”

Konoe's uppercut met perfectly with my jaw, which forced me to let out a groan, and tumble backwards. As a blessing in disguise, I somehow managed to at least avoid the shards of glass by diving onto the floor.

“That hurt...”

I tried to bear with the pain assaulting me, gently massaging my jaw right where it hurt, but the slimy and warm sensation on my palm remained—Wait, slimy and warm? Thinking that something was off, I looked down. There, I saw my palm colored with a deep red.

Blood. My nose was bleeding, as more red blood dropped onto my hand. Weirdly enough, despite being punched on the jaw, my nose started bleeding.

“Wha...how...why is this...”

Why is my nose bleeding even though I didn't even touch a girl?

“...Y-You touched them.”

I heard a quivering voice. When I tore my gaze away from my bloody hand, Konoe was embracing his own chest with both of his arms, blushing furiously while quivering in rage. It even looked like he was tearing up a bit.

“D-Don’t tell me...” I could tell that my own voice was shaking just as much.

Can you blame me? We’re talking about that Subaru-sama. The number one handsome boy at this school, admired by every single girl. And yet, there is only one thing that this could mean—

“You...are a girl?”

Inside my brain, a Beethoven concert was played. The title of the piece was ‘Fate’. The one that goes Da da da daaa, you know. Still, a girl. Konoe Subaru turned out to be a girl. I mean, who would imagine that such a cute girl would wear a boy’s clothes and attend high school like that.

This has to be some prank. I see, in about two seconds, several people with signs in their hands will come jumping out, making fun of me with ‘Ahaha! You idiot, you actually fell for it, hehe~!’, I just know it. Yeah, I wouldn’t mind that. Please, let it be that way. Come on, where are the cameras?

“—I’ll kill you.”

Right that instant, I was about to let out a shriek. I felt a chill. My skin was raising screams of terror and fear. Standing in front of me was Konoe, holding a crimson red fire extinguisher.

“—Wait, a fire extinguisheeeeer!?”

There’s no mistaking it. She really was holding one. Even a kindergarten boy would be able to tell. It must have been hanging at the wall of this science classroom. It was made of metal, red, and quivering in Konoe’s hands.

“P-Please wait a moment, Konoe-san. If you hit me with that, I don’t think that the only thing you’ll remove are my memories...”

“Yeah, that’s right. Perverts like you are not allowed to exist in this world.”

“I-It was an accident! I’m telling you, it wasn’t on purpose!”

“What do you mean by accident? You...You touched my chest, and had a nosebleed right after because you got so excited...!” Konoe howled in anger.

“You’re wrong! My nose didn’t start bleeding because I got excited! This is just because of my body—”

“Rejected. Don’t worry, I’ll bury your dead body inside this wall. And then, I’ll become a teacher in the future, so that I can watch over your body, and make sure nobody finds it.”

Eh, what’s going on? Konoe’s planning to become a full-fledged criminal! My hips gave out because of the terror filling my body. Gaaah, please move! I beg you, please—!

“Now, this is the end. Grit your teeth, and welcome death as you are filled with despair.”

I was given a declaration of death penalty. According to my horoscope in the morning, my lucky color today was supposed to be read. Maybe I shouldn’t be watching TV for a while. The red fire extinguisher popped up in my vision.

These were my thoughts the exact second the impact hammered onto my cranium.

♀ × ♂

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

My consciousness returned abruptly. As I was laying down, I pressed my left hand on my racing heart. That’s right, I woke up because of my own scream.

“...What a horrible way to wake up.”

Horrible indeed. That’s now how you want to wake up. Still, what a dream that was. Subaru-sama turned out to be a girl, and I got killed simply for finding out...Just by remembering the contents of my dream, fear and dread filled my body. A true nightmare that was. I feel like I watched a scene from the movie ‘Exorcist’ in first person.

“...Time to get up, I guess.” I let out a sigh, and muttered.

I put on the glasses next to my pillow, gaining a more clear view. What time is it even right now. I don't want to be late right after the new school term begins, as that would leave a bad impression.

“...Wait, what?”

My view had recovered, which allowed me to catch on to this weird scenery around me. First of all, this wasn't even my own room. On the ceiling, I spotted long and narrow fluorescent lights. These illuminated the shelf with the medicine, as well as a large white bed. This was clearly different from the room I was so used to. This was the infirmary.

No mistaking it. I've come here a handful of times, so I knew. This is our school's infirmary. But, why am I here, just waking up? For now, I decided to get up. My brain cells were somewhat waking up, as I wanted to pull away the blanket covering me by using my right hand. However, together with a metallic rattling sound, my hand would not move much.

“...Metallic rattling?”

It was a jarring metallic sound. At the same time, my right hand would not budge. Thinking that something was off, I looked down. There, I spotted a ring made out of silver metal—Handcuffs. This object for restriction was holding my right hand in place, connected to a post of the bed, like they were lovers.

“.....”

Um, what exactly is going on here? Am I still dreaming? If so, then this is a pretty horrible dream. Freddy Krueger might just come jumping out any second. I was wondering how to make it out of this predicament, trying to move my right hand out of the handcuffs. Damn it, I can't make it out. As expected, nothing budes. Is this what a stray dog feels after suddenly receiving a collar? This anxiety is unbearable.

But, dogs have it great. Even if you have a collar around your neck,

you get food. They're better off than me right now.

“—!”

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain. A headache assaulted my head. I subconsciously used my left hand to try and suppress the pain. Weird, it feels like I was hit by a hard object and suffered damage from the impact...

“...Hm?”

Wait a second. Since I can move my left hand, it means that it's not connected by the handcuffs, right? I moved my left hand again. Ohh, that's right. So only my right hand is tied up by the handcuffs. My left hand is completely free. After confirming this situation, I used this hand to remove the blanket that was covering my body.

“...!?”

There, I was about to let out a second shriek. There was a girl. She possessed glittering black hair, tied up on both sides, as she was sound asleep, slightly snuggling up to me.

Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?

A shriek was about to speed up out of my mouth like a F1 race car, so I forcefully pushed my teeth together. My breathing stopped. No, any worse, my heart was about to stop. After all, the girl next to me (as she naturally wore her uniform) was all too familiar to me. Just like Konoe, she wore a uniform different to the average student, resembling a more bourgeois feeling. Normally, that'd be against the dress code, but considering her backers, it makes sense why the school would keep quiet.

If Konoe was beloved and admired by every girl here at Rouran Academy, she would be an idol supported and cheered on by everybody. She possessed overwhelming proportions, and beauty. She was the perfect example of a cool beauty. Her manner was befitting of this image. With a clear and clever head, she gathers perfect grades, being the absolute, unparalleled honor student—Suzutsuki Kanade.

That's right, it's the master of Konoe, devotedly called 'Young lady', and the single daughter of our academy's board chairman—the rich lady inheriting the main [Suzutsuki] family—sleeping right next to me.

On a side note, we actually are in the same class, but we never talked. This makes sense of course. I'm your average guy you could find anywhere, and she's the top beauty of this school. The distance between us is as deep as the Mariana Trench. So then...why is she sleeping next to me?

"Mmm..." A faint moan escaped her lips.

...This is bad. A cold sweat ran down my back. She's a woman, sleeping next to me, so close, her breath about to touch me. If a woman comes this close to me...

"...Mm. Oh my, are you awake, Sakamachi-kun."

Her voice sounded dignified. She opened her eyes fully, and inspected my body before getting off the bed.

"Are you okay? Those handcuffs don't hurt, do they. I think their size should be fine."

"...What?"

.....Hold on a second. Did she really just say what I think she did?

"Don't worry, Sakamachi-kun." As I was lost in the situation, Suzutsuki continued with her usual calm tone. "The surgery was a success."

"...Eh?"

"With this, you've become one of us Shockers²."

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?" I was shocked.

Surgery...Some plastic surgery? Also, Shocker...What should I do, Suzutsuki Kanade's target age might be higher than I thought.

“Now that you have been transformed, you’re not a normal human being anymore. Come on, try screaming ‘Transformation!’. The secret power sleeping inside of you will be freed.”

“W-What did you say!? A-Alright, let me try! ...Transformation!” I passionately screamed, as I stayed seated on my bed.

Silence followed. A silence cold enough to freeze the infirmary.....Naturally, nothing happened. There’s no way I could just transform like that. Seriously, what am I doing. This is super embarrassing. I’m in high school, and screamed that out loud...

“Fu...ahahaha...”

I heard a faint snicker. I can’t believe it...That Suzutsuki was laughing. She held her stomach, about to suffocate.

“Ku...Fufu...Screaming transformation...in high school.:Aha, ahaha. Amazing. I would have loved to make that sight a wall painting and leave it behind for later generations.”

“.....”

Um, I do have some questions, you know. Is this really Suzutsuki Kanade? How do I say it, her impression is completely different from how I had seen her in class.The usual Suzutsuki...well...is always graceful, like a secluded noble lady. I mean, she still is as much of a beauty as before.

“So...Suzutsuki-san, can I ask something?”

“Fufu, what is it, Sakamachi-kun. Or, would you rather have me call you ‘Jirou’ like everyone else in our class?”

“I really don’t care...”

Jirou has been my nickname for ages. It’s pretty clear, as my full name is Sakamachi Kinjirou.

“Thanks a lot, Jirou-kun. You must have a lot of questions, so fire ahead.” Suzutsuki smiled gently.

...How could this happen? For a second, I was entranced by her. In the end, she still is Suzutsuki, the number one beauty of this school. That title isn't just for show. Just talking to her normally was nerve-wracking.

"T-Then, here I go? Were you the one who put those handcuffs on me?"

"That's right. But be careful, if you take that off, it'll remove the seal on your right arm."

What kind of shounen manga setting is that? Am I some close-range god from a battle anime?

"...Alright, I'll leave that side for now. Next, why did you sleep next to me?"

"Oh my, should I not have? I was just having a short power nap."

"Just a power nap..."

Damn, she calmly responded to my question. Is she not embarrassed? Does she not have any shame? I'm a healthy high school boy, you know.

"Don't worry, I had no plans whatsoever to be assaulted by you with your one and only hand."

"What kind of human do you think I am, oi?"

Who'd do something like that. Not to mention that there's another bed here in this infirmary. Because the curtains were pulled close, I couldn't see inside, but I bet it's not inhabited. She could have just slept there instead.

"...Oh right, where's our nurse Nakamoto-sensei?"

Looking at the clock, it was already past 6pm. Even at this time, an infirmary nurse should be present. Assuming that she didn't disregard her job.

"Ah, I asked for her assistance."

“Assistance?”

“Indeed. After I gave her a few consecutive slaps to the face, she started crying and left the infirmary.”

“What are you doing to a kind and benevolent teacher!?”

That’s not assistance, that’s straight-up violence. I feel bad for that woman. Nakamoto-sensei is a young and rather meek teacher. I’m sure she must be bawling her eyes out in the safety of her own car.

“No need to worry, I didn’t use my palm to slap her.”

“Eh?”

“That’s right, when I slapped her cheeks with a roll of banknotes a few times, she broke out in tears and ran out of the infirmary.”

“You bribed her! That’s what they call bribery!”

“When I asked about you, she just said ‘Ah, I don’t care about him!’, and gave me the keys.”

“I was sold out! My basic human rights were disregarded!”

“By the way, it cost me 10.000 yen.”

“So cheap! Is that my value as a human being!?”

“What are you talking about? You can’t put a price on human life.”

“You just did that, and you also bought me!”

Also, you say roll of banknotes, but you were using 1.000 yen notes, right! What is an infirmary teacher going to do with that, simply for selling out her student...

“Nakamoto-sensei...She must have a lot going on because she’s so young.”

“Possibly. But, that should have made things clear, right? I am currently having life-or-death power over you.” Suzutsuki’s lips twisted.

...Scary. My instincts were telling me to be terrified. It feels like I'm sitting in front of a female vampire. She might just leap at me at any given moment. Ahh, so scary.

"Now, with what should I start. Maybe your ears?"

"Ears!? What do you plan on doing with my ears!?"

"Fufu, I was joking. I'm not such a savage. We'll start with castrating you of course."

"Hold on a second! What is your desire, Suzutsuki-san! If it's something I can do, then just order me!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, as the handcuffs rattled.

Suzutsuki Kanade definitely isn't some noble lady, let me tell you. A noble lady would not have such a rotten personality!

"Don't misunderstand. You cannot do anything for me." Suzutsuki announced. "The reason we've restrained you like this is because you learned of my butler's secret."

"....."

Ahh, I figured. When she appeared, I guessed that it might be related to that. That nightmare just now wasn't actually my imagination, but cruel reality. In other words...

"Hey...Why is Konoe attending this school while wearing men's clothing?"

That's the biggest doubt I had in my mind. If it's her—Konoe Subaru's master—then she should know.

"Put simply, it's because of her family's circumstances."

"Her family's circumstances?"

"Indeed. That girl's...Subaru's lineage's men had served my family as butlers for generations. That is why she's working as a butler herself."

"...Why go through that pain? Can't just another brother take care of

that in her stead?”

“If only that was an option.” Suzutsuki slightly narrowed her eyes.

...Huh? Did I say something bad by any chance?

“Subaru is an only-child. That’s why she is working as my butler. If she had brothers, she would have been saved from that, I bet.”

“I-I see. Then, it can’t be helped...”

I wonder why, it felt like her tone was quite cold and detached. It’s like she’s refusing my question...

“However, my father—basically, the board chairman of this school—put out a condition so that Subaru could become my butler. Namely, if she can finish her student life, namely the next three years without anybody finding out that she is a woman. If not for that, she won’t be seen fit to be a butler of the Suzutsuki Family. That’s probably what he was trying to say.”

“...Eh? So then...”

“That’s right. Today, you found out that Subaru indeed is a girl. You know, she’s got an odd excessive obsession with being a butler of the Suzutsuki Family. That’s why she tried to seal your mouth...I’m sorry for the trouble my butler caused you.”

“.....”

That reminds me, where is Konoe right now? She’s not locking herself up because her secret was revealed, right?

“Hey, where is Konoe right now?”

“Fufu, are you worried? Well, if you want to meet her, then don’t worry about it. Because—Subaru is with us right now.”

“...Eh?”

She’s here? In this room? As I was left baffled, Suzutsuki walked towards the other bed, and opened the curtains.

“Wha—”

Right there, I lost all my words. Next to the bed I was restrained on, there was another. Sure enough, Konoe Subaru could be seen there.

“Mgh! Mghugh!” She let out a voice that couldn’t be explained in words.

Naturally, that was the best she could put out. I think you call it a ring gag? She had a black gag attached to her mouth. And, it wasn’t just that. Her entire body was restricted by silver chains, held together by padlocks. I’m sure that her hands must be restrained by handcuffs as well. This was a proper restriction.

Looking at myself, with only the handcuffs, I really got out of this easily. After all, Konoe Subaru was forcefully restrained, and sat down on top of the bed.

“H-Hey, what is this...” I asked with a quivering voice.

I mean, that explains why Suzutsuki would sleep next to me in this bed, but...

“Eh? Are you saying that this isn’t enough? Aren’t you quite the sadist? Can’t be helped, I’ll use this nose fix—”

“Stop! Why would you do such a thing!? Isn’t she your butler!?”

“Ehh, I did this for your sake, why would you say that?”

“When did I ask for this!?”

“I thought it would make you happy.”

“I’m really sorry to tell you, but I don’t have any interest in that!”

Seriously, it’s way too abnormal. Can’t you keep it on a more PG level.

“I see, then I assume it would be better if I removed those chains and handcuffs from her, right?”

“Of course.”

“Alright. Just don’t regret it.”

“As if I would!”

If I did, then my life as a human being would be over. Still, what a monster she is, tying up her own butler. She’s totally different compared to her attitude in class.

“Cough! Cough!”

The ring gag was removed from Konoe’s mouth, which let her breathe.

“H-How cruel, young lady! Why would you do such a thing!”

Yeah, I can understand that reaction. She got tied up by her own master, I’m sure you could bring this to court as a violation of the Labor Standards Act. However, once the chains around her body were gone, she would finally be free—

“Please...please hurry up and remove these chains! If not, I can’t kill that pervert!”

“.....”

...Weird. I feel like I heard some mighty violent words come out of her mouth...

“Hey, you pervert! Just wait there, terrified in fear! I’ll slaughter you! Remove you from this world! I’ll make sure your brain ends up flying all the way up to Argentina!”

Right as Konoe could use her own mouth again, she energetically threw this declaration of intended murder at me. I totally forgot! She’s trying to bury my body in darkness...!

“No need to rush things, Subaru. I’ll be removing them right away.” Flashing a faint smile, Suzutsuki reached for the chains restraining Konoe’s body.

“H-Hold on a second! Stop, Suzutsuki!”

Because of my words, Suzutsuki’s fingers stopped. However, that eerie smile of hers has yet to vanish.

“What’s wrong, Jirou-kun. I was just trying to free Subaru like you asked me to.” The corners of her lips raised up, as she let out a snicker. “I never told you, but the reason you’re still with us is thanks to me. I was the one who saved you from that science room. I also was the one who stopped the rampaging Subaru. Do you finally understand your own position, Jirou-kun?”

“...Yes, I fully understand, Suzutsuki-san.”

“Eh? I’m sorry, could you say that one more time, I couldn’t properly hear you.”

“...Yes, thank you very much for saving me, Suzutsuki-sama.”

“Fufu, as long as you understand.” She said, brimming with satisfaction, as she pulled her hands away from the chains.

...Indeed, I really get it now. Suzutsuki Kanade is a sadist. A hardcore sadist on top of that. Unlike when she’s with everyone in class, she now was like a black sun, shining brightly. This is the true personality of this school’s top beauty. Oh, weird...my field of view is suddenly so blurry...

“No way! Please, remove these chains, young lady!” Konoe screamed, her chains and padlocks shaking. “This pervert forcefully touched my breasts! Not to mention that his nose started bleeding because of the excitement! He is a confirmed criminal! We need to remove his existence right away!”

“...Hey, I told you that was an accident. I didn’t have any bad intentions. Not to mention, didn’t you already hit me twice?”

“Silence! I didn’t hit you nearly enough! The fire extinguisher just ended up with a few bents!”

“I call that a failed attempt at murder!”

If not for me being her target, they would have been doing backstrokes in the Sanzu River by now. At times like these, I'm glad to have such a tough body.

"Also, why are you wearing male clothing but female underwear? Just wear some boxers or whatever."

"S-Shut up! Like I would wear such gross underwear!" Konoe screamed, trying to keep her breathing under control. "Not to mention...Because of you...because of you, I'll get fired from being a butler! What are you going to do about this!?"

"Don't be that angry. It's not weird to be unemployed in today's Japan. Let's go to Hello Work tomorrow, okay?"

"I-I don't want that! I need to stay as the young lady's butler no matter what...!"

Urk, crap. She looks like she's about to cry. Or rather, she's pretty much already crying.

"I'll curse you! If I get fired, then I'll possess your pillow as an evil spirit."

"Come on now, you haven't died yet."

"To me, it's pretty much the same...!"

What should I do about this? I was faltering. I never made a girl cry besides someone from my family. That's why I have no resistance towards a situation like this. It's like I was infected by some unfamiliar virus.

"It's fine, Subaru." Suzutsuki showed the smile of an angel.

Everybody who heard this would feel relief and safety.

"Why do you think I restrained Jirou-kun like this? I'm trying to make sure that you won't have to quit."

"....."

Um, what exactly do you mean by that? I felt worried at the tone she was showing, when—she suddenly jumped at my hip, like she was trying to ride me.

“!”

My breathing stopped. She’s so light. Maybe not comparable to a bird’s feather, but Suzutsuki’s body was not weighing anything.

“...Wait, that’s not important!”

“What isn’t important?” She played with her long hair, speaking calmly like she was on a coffee break.

At the same time, I was opening and closing my mouth like a goldfish waiting to be fed, about to foam from the mouth.

“Jirou-kun, you have some special disposition, correct?”

Twitch.

“I heard from Subaru. When your nose started bleeding, you talked about this, right.”

Eeeek, she really knows how to stab me where it hurts. My heart’s pace went up ten-fold, about to be shoot out from my mouth.

“Do you plan on staying quiet?”

Judge Suzutsuki began the extraordinary trial. Of course, the accused was me. So, I’ll use my right to remain silent. Now that I’m tied to this bed, unable to move, I can only play the part of a corpse!

“Very well. Then—I’ll just ask your body directly.”

“Eh?”

Atop my hip, the girl’s mouth twisted upwards. Her white fingers started opening up the buttons of my shirt.



“H-Hey, why are you doing that?”

“Quiet. What if my hands slipped, and I hurt your heart.”

“Don’t say scary stuff like that!”

“By the way, my grip strength with one hand is 80kg.”

“As if!”

“Fufu, I guess that was too obvious. But, no need to worry. Out of all the torture methods passed down inside my family, I’ll just use the most gruesome ones—”

“Alright, I get it already! Just stop touching me!”

Even my scream that contained all of my soul did not reach Suzutsuki. Her slender fingers crawled along my rib. Her fingertips spread a cold sensation wherever they touched me, which led my heart to race faster.

—This is bad. I felt blood gathering at a single part of my body. My face felt hot, my nose tightening up. No can do, I can’t hold back anymore.

Pssssh.

I heard the sound of something spraying out of my nose. I saw the color red splattered in front of me. It was blood, coming from my nose. As expected, when Suzutsuki touched my body, I couldn’t avoid getting a nosebleed.

“Y-You pervert! How dare you hold such lust towards the young lady...!”

I heard a voice roaring of anger from the bed next to mine. Right in front of me sat Suzutsuki, splattered with the blood that came out of my nose.

“Fufu...I see. This is quite interesting.” Suzutsuki narrowed her eyes, like she was thinking about something. “To think you’d get a nosebleed just by a girl touching you.”

“Eh?” A question mark popped up above Konoe’s head.

At the same time, I bet the word ‘Despair’ was floating above my head. Someone found out my secret, something I never told anybody outside my family. And it had to be girls from my class...

“Some allergy by any chance? That is a rare condition.”

“...No, it’s not some allergy. This is an acquired human-made problem of mine...” I continued. “So, do you know about Sakamachi Akemi?” I brought up a new topic.

“I sure do. Not too long ago, she was on TV a lot. I think her profession was—A female pro-wrestler.”

That’s right, Sakemachi Akemi is a pro-wrestler with the name ‘Fresh Blood Queen’, possessing several titles in the pro-wrestling world. She’s famous in the eyes of the general public, which is why she frequently appeared on TV. As for why she’s important in this context...

“The thing is, she’s actually my mother.”

“...That is the first time I heard of this.” Suzutsuki seemed a bit surprised at that fact.

“But, how is that related to your condition?” Konoe seemed confused.

That’s right, it might not seem related at all, but it’s actually essential. This is of greater associativity than Gundarium Alloy³.

“And, about that...I’m being hit at home.”

““What?””

Hearing my words, both Konoe and Suzutsuki gave me a baffled reaction, their mouths wide open.

“Mom just loves all these martial arts, you know. So does my little sister, who’s a year younger than me. Ever since I was a little child, I was pretty much used by them as some sort of guinea pig or practice partner, always on the receiving end.”

Ahh, just remembering it has my hair stand on edge. If you were to describe my position inside the family with a single word, then I was a punching bag. Brainbuster, STO⁴, Frankensteiner, Texas Cloverleaf...and so on. The names of techniques that I can think of rival the number of stars in the sky.

“With excuses like ‘This is in order to train you!’ or ‘Tough love!’ or ‘I

love Onii-chan!’, they continued to use me to practice, every single day and for years. As a result, this embarrassing condition was born.”

Gynophobia. When trying to explain my condition, that word would probably be the fastest. Caused by the distorted environment and influence of my family, I became practically unable to touch any living being called a woman. Well, a somewhat positive side effect of that is that my body became quite sturdy.

“But, why the nosebleed then?”

“I don’t really get it myself, but it must be some sort of habit. Not to mention, as soon as my nose started bleeding, they would stop hurting me. However, that also happens as soon as a girl even gets to touching me.”

“...Still, I guess that just shows how kind your family is. They stopped hitting you as soon as your nose started bleeding, right?” Konoe argued.

“...No, that’s not it. When I asked them, they said that they didn’t want to get the room dirty.”

“.....” Konoe grew silent.

She looked at me like a rain-drenched puppy cast away in cruelty. It seems like she’s sympathizing with me. Maybe she’s actually better of a person than I initially thought.

“So basically.” Suzutsuki said, as she still sat on me. “You are like a chicken who gets terrified whenever you are touched by a girl.”

It felt like she stabbed a knife right into my heart. What is this woman saying, can you not throw such a straight-ball at me? If you’re not going to use another throw, you’ll break the wooden bat that is my heart.

“Isn’t that right, **Sakamachi Kinjirou-kun.**”

“!?”

S-She calmed me by my full name at such a timing? Don’t tell me...

did she realize? Nobody else caught on to my name so far...!

“What’s wrong? Say something, Sakamachi Kinjiro-kun.”

“.....”

“Sakamach**ikin**jiro-kun?”

“.....”

“Sakama, **Chicken**, Jiro-kun?”

“.....”

“Chicken-kun?”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Unable to bear with it, I screamed.

“What’s wrong, Chicken-kun? Sports drinks are coming out of your eyes.”

“Stop! Don’t call me that way!”

...I’m cursed. That has to be it. They say that a name reflects the soul, but it is exactly the case here. To think that the vexing word ‘Chicken’ was engraved in my name.

“It’s a wonderful name, isn’t it. You don’t need to be so embarrassed about it.”

“How would you reach that conclusion?”

“I know, you should marry someone with the name ‘Okamachi’ in the future. That would make it even more interesting.”

“Huh?”

Okamachi Kinjiro. Okamachikinjiro. Okama⁵, chicken, jiro...

“Funny, right?”

“Not at all! How can you come up with something terrifying like that!?”

Are you a demon or something? Devil Suzutsuki, I knew it. That’s what I’ll be calling her from now on. This is my own type of resistance.

“That would be a bit cruel.”

“Wha!? You can tell what I’m thinking!?”

“If you’re going to give me a special name, at least make it ‘Angel of Massacre Kanade-sama’, okay?”

“Evil! You just turned into a secret final boss!”

“Or, would you prefer ‘Lyrical ☆ Kanade-chan’.”

“The 180 is terrifying! It doesn’t fit you at all!”

“Then ‘Angel of Massacre ☆ Kanade-chan’?”

“Don’t mix them together!”

Let me conclude, Suzutsuki is still Suzutuski after all. My image of her broke entirely.

“By the way, Jirou-kun.” Suddenly, the air around Suzutsuki changed. “Don’t you want to fix this phobia of yours?”

“...I mean, of course I do.”

Imagine getting a nosebleed by simply touching a girl. People will get the wrong idea, just like Konoe previously did. Like that, I’ll always be alone. The birth rate here in Japan will decrease even further, as the generations age more. I want to get rid of this phobia. I want to have it gone, and touch a girl.

“Then, how about I help you?”

“Eh...?” I doubted my ears.

“I personally think that this phobia came into existence because this

fear of women was continuously driven into your body. That's why you reflexively get a nosebleed with no exception. Classical conditioning, I think it was. However, if you can get rid of this phobia, you'll be freed from these nosebleeds, right?"

"That's..."

I wonder? I feel like what Suzutsuki is saying might be true. But, how am I supposed to get rid of this phobia?

"Why don't we help you?" Suzutsuki announced with a calm attitude, like it was the most natural thing in the world. "We will help you in healing that phobia. Basically, you just have to start thinking that girls aren't anything scary. Subaru and I will assist you in that endeavour. In return..."

"In return?"

"We want you to keep quiet about Subaru being a girl."

Even if it kills you—she added at the end. I get what she's trying to say. Basically, this is an exchange. I'll protect Subaru's secret until my death, whereas Suzutsuki and Subaru help me cure my gynophobia.

"My father should not know that you learned of Subaru's secret just yet. If you keep this incident a secret, it won't count as us breaking his condition."

"...Isn't that pretty dishonest?"

"As long as he doesn't find out, it doesn't matter. And? How does that pact sound?"

"Rather than this being a pact, we're partners in crime."

"Wonderful, I like that. With that kind of relationship—I won't be bored for a while."

"...Just out of curiosity...what if I declined?"

"Then, I would have had to rely on more drastic measures like Subaru. In about a month, they would probably be able to find an

unidentifiable body near the sea of trees close to Mt. Fuji.”

Phew, she sure knows how to scare me shitless. What do you mean by partners in crime? She’s clearly threatening me. But...Whether it’s this or that—I don’t have any other path.

“I got it, I’ll agree to these conditions, Suzutsuki...But, are you okay with that, Konoe?” I directed my gaze towards Konoe.

We’re talking about the person who screamed while calling me a pervert. She probably hates the idea of teaming up with me. Oddly enough, Konoe seemed to be a bit lost in thought, staying quiet.

“I am Kanade-ojousama’s butler, and will follow her orders. Not to mention...”

“Not to mention?”

“No...it’s nothing.”

For some reason, she sounded like she wanted to say something, only to avert her face again.

“Fufu, seems like everything’s decided, then.”

For some reason, Suzutsuki showed quite the delighted smile. What, did she see something interesting?

“By the way, Jirou-kun, there’s something I’d like to ask. With your gynophobia, is your only symptom that you suffer from a nosebleed? What happens if you’re already bleeding, and you continue being touched by a girl?”

“Eh? Well...I’d probably faint from the blood loss?”

In reality, there were a lot of times I fainted while being used by Mom and my little sister. I don’t know what exactly happened after, but since I woke up relatively fine and healthy, I doubt they did anything bad.

“But, what about—”

That's how far I spoke, only to grow silent shortly after. Or rather, I could not speak another word. Suzutsuki's fingers once again reached out for my ribs.

"U-Um, Suzutsuki-san?"

"Don't worry about a thing, Jirou-kun. This is a test. I want to confirm as to how much your body can handle, with the future in mind." Devil Suzutsuki showed a bright smile.

Oh crap, she definitely is enjoying this.

"S-Stop! You don't have to go that fahyah!"

"Fufu, I only touched you a little bit, and yet you let out such a cute voice."

Her long and slender fingers crawled along my skin...I can't anymore. This situation might seem like heaven for some, but with someone like me, suffering from gynophobia, this is close to torture. My view was about to black out. At this rate, my soul would go on a trip towards the other side.

"S-Save me, Konoe! At this rate, I'll seriously faint!" With the last bit of energy I had, I threw an SOS over at the girl.

"...I am a butler, not some magician. I won't be able to slip out of these chains." Subaru-sama said, and actually closed her damn eyes.

"Hey! Don't just act like you're sleeping! Please, don't just cast me aside!"

"Oh my, so you have a birthmark right here, Jirou-kun. How adorable. Because of your family's treatment, your body is quite firm as well. I will be able to enjoy myself after you faint."

I heard a distant snickering voice. Ahh, so this kind of lifestyle will become the norm for me, is it...I felt my consciousness slowly fade away. In the midst of that, I could only pray to the gods that my chastity would be safe when I wake up.

- 1 Spicy Korean pickled cabbage
- 2 Some weird group appearing in Kamen Rider
- 3 Some material in the Gundam series to build Gundam
- 4 Space Tornado Ogawa
- 5 Not too sure about this one, but I think that she's saying Okama as 'Buttocks' there.

Chapter 2: A Lovely Romance Arrives Abruptly

No matter how grim and dark the night may be, dawn will arrive. No matter how much you don't want the next day to come, another morning is inevitable.

This being the case, I looked at the clock in my room. It was currently 7am flat. A time where I would have to slowly get out of bed in order to not end up late. Outside the window, I heard the sounds of rain. Until yesterday, it wasn't raining at all, but this rainy weather had the inside of my heart feeling quite melodramatic.

On a side note, usually I have a lot of trouble getting up in the morning, and my body is pretty much like a corpse at best. Not to mention that I have the bad habit of smashing my alarm clock to the ground completely subconsciously, which led me to buy at least 5 new ones this year alone. One day I might be killed by an evil alarm clock spirit.

Even so, I miraculously never ended up late once. It's honestly gross how that happened, and how I was never absent. I don't mean to brag, but I have a prize for perfect attendance. You might ask how that would be possible? It's simple. There is a human being living at my home that is stronger and more reliable than any alarm clock.

"Nii-saaaaaan! It's moooooorning!"

A voice resembling fire crackers resounded, and the door to my room opened. Standing in the doorway was a first-year high school girl with a shortcut hairstyle greatly befitting her. She wore Rouran Academy's innocent uniform. Her face is fairly cute, but still young. Especially her eyes. They were sparkling with naivete and innocence. Her attitude and expression knew no sadness or depression. She gave off the image that sports were her strong suit.



In short, she's my little sister, Sakamachi Kureha.

“Uryaaaaah!”

Following a scream overflowing with energy, Kureha jumped at me. Her small body danced through the air. However, as this wasn't a space with its vacuum, the obvious happened. Her soaring through the air didn't last for long, as she flew towards the ground quickly

after, aiming directly at my abdomen—

“Bueh!?”

It was a diving elbow drop. Met with this excavating vertical impact, my body folded like a V-shape on top of the bed. Normally, this would revive you from a suspended animation. If anything, most people would probably faint from that, and be brought to the ICU. Of course, with no possible recovery. I managed to avoid it once, but the bed I had just bought from a rental shop ended up looking like a U after the impact. This move had enough impact to rival the destructive force of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

“Morning, Nii-san!”

Together with a beaming smile, Kureha moved on to her next move. Sadly, my little sister isn’t kind enough to let me off the hook with just that. She tore off my blanket, and immobilized my joins with a double-arm lock.

“There! Ankle lock!”

“Gyaaaaah!”

“Following that, a STF¹!”

“H-Hold on a...Gaaaah!”

“Next u p, a rear naked choke!”

“...! ...!!! ...!? (An indescribable voice).”

“And finally, a back-lying perpendicular armbar!”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?”

“...Ah, sorry about this, Nii-san...I broke your elbow.”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?”

“Tehe, just kidding~”

“.....”

“After all, I was aiming for your carotid artery today~”

“A three-angle lock!?”

.....Well, this is about how my usual mornings go. I’m pretty much used to it at this point.

“One more time...Good morning, Nii-san! How was I today?” Wiping away the blood from my nose with her usual attitude, Kureha asked me.

“...Flawless as always. Thanks to that, Nii-chan was about to fall asleep again.”

I wasn’t lying. That last part was definitely dangerous. With a bit more, I might have been able to greet my old man, who died ten years ago, at a flower field.

“Nyahaha. Alright, that concludes my morning practice as well.” Kureha got off the bed, and showed me a bright smile.

By the way, she’s a member of the handicrafts club. I mean, seriously. I thought she’d join the karate club or open up some pro-wrestling research committee, but the handicrafts club, huh. At high school, a woman has to polish herself, or something like that. But, what kind of morning practice does a handicraft club even do?

“Well, our handicrafts club is quite a strong team. We’re doing fitness training every morning.”

“Fitness training?”

“Yup, it’s pretty amazing. Our club president can split a concrete block with her fingers.”

This is bad news, dear god. My little sister joined some weird organization right after enrolling at high school.

“During Golden Week, we’ll all go to the mountains for a training camp. It’ll be like a three days two nights survival camp. Sounds fun, right?”

“...I feel like your club is fundamentally messed up.”

I never heard of such a handicrafts club existing, oi. What’s next, being brainwashed and forced to wear green berets? She might get sent to the Middle East before I even know it.

“I wanted to fight a real beat at least once, so this is the perfect chance.”

“Better give up on that, you’ll die at this rate.”

“Ehh, it’ll be fine. Mom wrote a letter and said that she fought a tiger in India just fine before.”

“Don’t compare yourself to Mom. She’s not a human anymore.”

Our mother is too strong, she lost any kind of person she could possibly fight in the ring, and went on a trip to get stronger about half a year ago, leaving the country entirely. Around once a month, she’d send us allowance and a letter, so she must be alive, but I haven’t the foggiest as to where she is at right now. She might be fighting a mummy in Egypt for all I know.

“That reminds me, Nii-san, you got bags below your eyes. Did you not sleep too much?”

Too much—Rather, nothing at all. I pretty much pulled an all-nighter.

“Yeah, I was pondering about my human relationships.”

“Nya?” Her eyes opened wide like she had seen a yeti on a snowing mountain.

“What? Even I’m a high school student. Have my own problems.”

“Nii-san...Are you being bullied?”

I immediately denied that assumption, but actually wasn’t too sure. I feel like what happened at the infirmary yesterday could be regarded as bullying. If possible, I don’t even want to go to school today.

“Then, is it a woman?”

“Well, you could say that.”

That’s not wrong either. I did wish it was, though.

“...Hmmm, I see. So Nii-san ended up at that age where he thinks about this stuff, huh.”

“Are you some old lady from our neighborhood? Can you not sound so impressed?”

“So, when’s the marriage ceremony?”

“Hold your horses. Is your head working with a jet engine?”

“If possible, I’d like a little sister.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, but I’m not interested in girls younger than you.”

“I don’t want to be an auntie at my age though.”

“...Come on, have some more faith in your older brother. Do I seem like the type of person who would do that?”

“.....” Kureha showed a profound expression, choosing to stay silent.

Do I actually? It’s hard to believe that my own little sister would see me as a human being devoid of any faithfulness and virtue.

“I mean, you’re always peeking when I’m taking a bath...”

“Don’t say stuff that could be misinterpreted. I never once peeked at my family bathing.”

“Eh? I’m always doing that, though?”

“Yeah yeah, funny joke.”

“You always start washing yourself from below your armpit, right?”

“You seriously were peeking at me!?”

How does she know of that? It’s a top secret I never even told my goldfish that I once kept.

“Ah, right. How about you take a shower? Your bed hair is going wild.”

“You’re saying that now? You probably just want to peek at me again, right.”

“Nyahaha, not wrong.”

“I’m not!?”

“I’d be joining you after all. That’s what we always do, right?”

“We don’t! I barely even remember the last time we took a bath together!”

To be accurate, I think that was like until my second year in grade school. It’s a distant past, looking at it from my current point of view.

“Come on, don’t be so boring.”

“That’s not the problem. Taking a bath with my little sister at this age is getting close to being a crime.”

“Uuu...Look at this, Dad up in heaven, Nii-san has finally entered his rebellious phase.” Kureha crossed her fingers, and looked up at the ceiling.

Don’t worry, old man. I’m not rebellious at all, I was trained by your wife and daughter to not even dare to speak back at them. I’m very loyal now, and at the bottom of the hierarchy in this family.

“Well, leaving that aside. I really think it’d be better for you to take a shower. Your bed hair is all over the place, and your face is something else.”

“What’s my face like?”

“Um...Russian?”

“That’s pretty rude, alright. This’ll cause an international problem.”

“It’s fine. I’m trained in the commando sambo.”

“It seriously doesn’t sound like a joke since it’s you saying that.”

The commando sambo is the name of a martial art used officially by the Russian army. It’s something resembling judo, and I heard that it’s been growing more and more in the ring. Of course, the one who taught Kureha this ridiculous and dangerous technique was none other than Mom. She’s not only potent when it comes to wrestling, but also fighting arts from all different countries, knowing countermeasures for them as well. It really is terrifying to think about.

“Not to mention that our coach should know a thing or two about the sambo.”

“Coach? Are you talking about the handicrafts club?”

“Yup, that’s right. He’s called Sergei-san.”

“.....”

No matter how I look at it, he sounds like a genuine Russian. Is that going to end up okay, dear handicrafts club of Rouran Academy. What if he’s some training instructor from some secret intelligence agency? I might have to ask Suzutsuki about that another time.

“So, Nii-san. I gotta head off to morning practice. I already finished preparing breakfast, so you have to eat it properly.”

“And...what’s on the menu today?” I asked, scared.

You can’t blame me. The breakfast for this past week basically consisted of kimchi without exception. I am very thankful that Kureha is pretty much taking care of all the housework, but she apparently has no sense when it comes to food, so her menus generally are very simple.

“It’s fine, today is different from usual.”

“Seriously! Ahh, that’s reassuring. I guess you can’t keep the menu the same for more than a week.”

“Yup. I felt the same way, so I kept the kimchi domestic today.”

“...Yay, I’m so happy I could cry, haha~”

Calm down, I can’t get angry at this. I can’t win either way, and this is still better compared to back when Mom was still here. Thinking back on it, she would always add some weird nutrients.

“Alright, Nii-san. Let’s meet at school if we can!” Kureha’s skirt fluttered because of her movement, as she left the room.

She’s brimming with energy as always. She’s completely different from me. Are we even related by blood? Anyway, time to take a shower. I grabbed a bath towel, and headed to the shower room. It’s not that I’m listening to the orders of my little sister, but I just want to freshen up my body and feelings. After all, today marks the beginning of my rehabilitation program, planned by Suzutsuki Kanade...

“Gotta...get some groove on.” I muttered, as if to tell myself.

I somehow made it through the incident in the infirmary to some degree, but the school isn’t a place for my heart to rest anymore. In other words, my home was the one oasis I had left. I at least wanted to get some proper rest here. With these thoughts, I headed to the changing room. Take a shower, and freshen up, that’s the most important right now.

I opened the door. Inside stood an unfamiliar beautiful girl. She was naked.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?”

Unable to process what was going on, I raised a loud scream. What is this!? Is this heaven? Did Kureha’s elbow send my consciousness to heaven!? Damn it, I’m not wearing any glasses right now! Thanks to that, everything I was looking at looked blurry...!



“.....”

No, cool down. Calm. Panicking won't help you. Focus your thoughts on what's important.

I saw drenched hair and wet skin, proving that she must have been taking a shower until not too long ago, as she was drying her hair with a bath towel. The body in front of me belonged to a girl still in

her growth. A bit of youth remained in sight, but she possessed the beauty of a butterfly about to grow wings. That's what it felt to me.

"...Wait, hold on."

Why am I just calmly depicting this naked body? As I stood frozen stiff, the girl wrapped the bath towel around her body, and then directed her transparent eyes directly at me.

"Close them."

"Huh?"

"Close your eyes."

I did as I was told, and closed my eyes. I felt an odd yet overwhelming pressure telling me to do so. And then, I felt something touching both my eyelids. What is this? Fingers? Why would there—

"Guh!?" An odd groan came from deep down my throat.

Something was putting immense pressure on my eyeballs on top of my eyelids.

"Gyaaaaaaaaah! My eyes! My eyeeeees!"

Screaming in pain, I writhed on the floor of the changing room. No, wait a second. I remember this merciless violence. My body... remembers the sensation. This attack with no restraint at all...There's only one person who could do such a thing with no remorse...!

"Be thankful that I did not steal your eyesight." An alto voice reached my ears.

With how much it was lacking in emotion, I didn't even need to think about who I was dealing with.

"Konoe! What are you doing in my home!?" I screamed, as I held my eyes in pain.

That's right, none other than Konoe Subaru stood in the changing room of my home.

“When I came here, that little sister girl of yours told me to ‘Come on in and take a shower’, so I did.”

“W-Why would she...”

“She must have been worried about me catching a cold. It started raining on the way here, so I ended up drenched. So, I relied on this kindness of hers.”

“.....”

No, that definitely wasn’t it. Damn it, that Kureha...She really played me there. If I had to guess, this is probably another prank of hers. When I would go to take a shower, I would run into another male classmate of mine. That sounds like something she would do. Then again, I could probably laugh about it, and call it a day...If Konoe actually was a boy, that is.

“Why did you even come to my place this early in the morning!”

“Orders from the young lady. So that you wouldn’t reveal my secret, I have to properly look over you. To do that, I planned on heading to school with you, which is why I came here.”

That damn Devil Suzutsuki, I doubt she pulled a conspiracy with Kureha, but she definitely sent Konoe here in hopes of causing some interesting event for her. Ahh, I can hear some loud laughter in the distance. Didn’t you succeed, you damn plotter.

“Leaving that aside...You saw me naked, didn’t you.”

Urk.

“Do you know? My family has a memory erasing technique that has been passed down for generations.”

Of course I know. I already got to learn of that yesterday, plenty that is. Thanks to that, my head still hurts.

“And, you earned yourself the right to experience that first-hand.”

“No, I’m good. You can make that as a year-end gift, and send it to

the people that have taken care of you.”

Or sell it online at an auction. With how maniacal it is, someone out there might actually buy it. You could even add some premium benefits. But, as I was thinking that, beyond the darkness of my closed eyelids, I felt an immeasurable pressure crawling along my skin—Killing intent. It reminded me of the chill I had felt yesterday, only worse. It told me that I had no more safe place in this world.

“...Even though that was my first time.”

There, I heard an oddly sulking voice, reaching my ears.

“Eh?” I wanted to ask for the meaning behind those words, but my consciousness fell into darkness well before that.

♀ × ♂

“Yo, Jirou, what’s up? That’s some economic slump face you got there.”

After heading into the classroom, and taking my seat, my classmate Kurose came talking to me.

“Zip it, Kurose. What kind of face is that supposed to be? Does it say ‘Out of stock’ on my forehead or something?”

“Oh no~ Jirou-kun sure is pretty tilted today~”

When I threw a complaint at that guy, he just started laughing loudly, that bastard. Kurose Yamato, a rotten connection of mine I had known ever since my first year in middle school. He’s fairly tall, with wide shoulders. Back in middle school, he even made it to the nationals with his judo skills, but in high school, he instead went to become a drummer at the school’s light music club.

“Something bad happened? Were you bullied by your little sister again?”

“...Something like that.” I responded, and felt the back of my head hurting again.

Ahh, damn that violent butler. She enjoys punching others way too much. Life isn't some whack-a-mole game.

"Huh, isn't that rough. By the way, Jirou." Kurose moved closer to my ears, whispering. "Is it true that you came to school today with that Subaru-sama?"

I was about to scream in shock. How does that guy know?

"You serious? Woah, how did that happen? Why would some average guy like you come to school with this academy's prince? You got some special relationship or whatsit?"

Correct. This guy's intuition sure is scary at times. According to what I heard, he also predicted the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake.

"We just happened to meet mid-way. Didn't group up on purpose."

"I figured as much. There's no way an honor student like him would have any business with you." Kurose said, as he looked towards the back of the classroom.

Following his gaze, I spotted Subaru-sama, or more commonly known as Konoe. She was quietly sitting at her seat, but even her sour expression looked like it was sparkling. Hmm, it seems like she's still angry because of what happened this morning. Or is it that? Did she not like the kimchi? Was it too commoner for her to enjoy? She was pretty shocked like 'Is this what commoners eat...?', huh.

"Konoe seems a bit gloomy, right. Leaves a bad impression. Even if he's got the looks and grades, no other boy would bother approaching him like that. He's cold towards the girls as well."

With a single glance, you could tell that Konoe was always alone in class. That became especially apparent because Suzutsuki (in her honor student mode) was talking with other girls from our class. Whenever these two aren't together, Konoe's always like this, just gazing outside the window. The Lonely Prince, that is how Konoe acted at school.

"Oh right, how did you even know that I came to school with Konoe?"

“Hah, don’t take me for an idiot. We have the greatest tool in the world to gather information, our phones. The news of Subaru-sama being together with someone besides Suzutsuki Kanade spread faster than some new-type influenza. From what I heard, the [S4] are already acting.”

“S4?”

“Hey now, don’t tell me you don’t know? It stands for ‘Shooting Star Subaru-sama’. Because there’s 4 S’s in there? It’s the underground fanclub of Subaru-sama here at Rouran, holding probably the most influence overall. I heard that at least 60% of all girls are part of that.”

“...So, what do you mean they are acting?”

“Huh? Ain’t that obvious? They’ll try everything to get in your way of walking to school with Subaru-sama. Better be careful, they might try to assassinate you.”

What kind of assassination is he talking about? Like some ninja leaping at me from the ceiling?

“Also, there were always some weird rumours going around about you.”

“Weird rumours?”

“Yup. That you’re gay.”

This time, I couldn’t stop myself from spitting out whatever saliva I had in my mouth. What kind of terrifying piece of information is that supposed to be? I thought my heart gave out.

“Ah, wrong after all?”

“Of course!”

“So wait, are you...bisexual?”

“Stop joking around! Why! Why is such a baseless rumour going around!”

“I mean, you never talk with the girls in class, and don’t even try to approach them. You’re in the prime of your youth, so how’s that a thing? That’s why that rumour is going around. Saying that Sakamachi Kinjiro got the hots for guys because you literally don’t show any interest in girls.”

“.....” My head hurt again.

More accurately speaking, it’s not that I have no interest, but rather that I can’t approach any girls because of my gynophobia. That sure is troublesome, I had no idea a rumour like that was going around...

“Don’t worry about it. Half of all that is just jokes and funnies. There’s not really that many who actually take it seriously. I know that you like girls. We’re buddies who shared our favorite porn magazines with each other.” Kurose laughed loudly.

He’s as straightforward and honest as always. But, it’s reassuring to know he feels that way, and knows what the truth is. In the end, all you need is one person to understand after all. It feels like a small family.

“But, you better be careful. There’s fanatics inside of S4 who seem to have misunderstood your relationship with Subaru-sama. Watch your back when you’re walking outside at night. And, keep an eye out on Subaru-sama, I don’t think anything good comes from being around him.” Kurose said, and turned towards the blackboard.

The door to the classroom opened, with the teacher for our first period walking in. Thus, our usual student life began yet again. Well, it’s probably a better idea to keep my distance from Konoe.

With these thoughts, I rested my upper body on my desk. It was decided that I’d be meeting Suzutsuki after classes are over, so I need as much stamina as I can. As the teacher started the class, I felt my consciousness fade away. The decisive battle will happen later.

♀ × ♂

However, the problem always arrives without warning.

“Let’s eat lunch together.”

Lunch break came, and Konoe beckoned me over with these words. Like a bullet had shot through the room, the classroom grew noisy. After all, the Subaru-sama who never paid any attention to anyone but Suzutsuki was now inviting me to eat lunch. It was a rare event on the level of a seal being spotted in the Tama River.

“Hey...that Konoe just invited some random guy to eat lunch.”

“Apparently, these two also came to school together this morning...”

I could hear our classmates whispering between each other. Not good, this situation will only get worse.

“Don’t tell me...the rumours about Jirou were true...?”

“Eh? Rumours? Tell me, tell me...”

They’re not true at all. I definitely do not swing that way.

“To think he would lay his hands on Subaru-sama...Unforgivable.”

“Kill...I’ll kill him. Kill him. That shitty four-eyes, I’ll tie him up, and bury him in the concrete...”

I’m sorry, all your gazes hurt. Also, don’t just direct all that killing intent at me. I won’t be able to go to the toilet alone at night.

“J-Jirou, you...” Kurose looked at me like a mother shocked at her son’s actions.

“Y-You’re wrong! This is just a misunderstanding—”

“What do you mean misunderstanding? Let’s go.”

I tried to clear up the tension in the classroom, but Konoe forcefully pulled me along. The classroom grew even more noisy, and I could see Suzutsuki smiling to herself.

“H-Hey! Where are we going!”

We left the classroom and walked down the hallway, but the gazes hitting us were still as intense as before.

“To a place with no people around. We won’t be able to relax with all this noise around us.”

Are we some couple on a date or something?

“Don’t get the wrong idea, it’s not like I wanted to eat lunch together with you. This is merely one measure to watch over you. I have no idea what you might be doing when I’m not properly watching over you.” Konoe said, without even looking at me.

It feels like I’m being treated like a dog in heat. If you’re that worried, then just put a collar on me, alright.

“I get it, I get it. Then let’s go up to the rooftop. I doubt many people will be up there.” I gave an offer.

If there was no way out of this, I at least wanted to get it over quickly. I’d probably get hit if I disagreed. Since I didn’t have any lunch box with me, I had to stop at the school store, same as Konoe. It seems like she’s actually abysmal at cooking, so she has to rely on the school food. How unexpected, I didn’t think Subaru-sama was bad at something.

“Urk...” Konoe squinted at some hot dog bun with a serious gaze.

It seems like this is her first time coming there. I went to check the bread myself. Today’s recommendation is...Kimchi sandwiches? Like hell I’d get that. Can you stop with the Korean boom already?

“Just make it yakisoba bread or the chocolate horns. There’s some other small dishes in there.” I said, as I bought some croquette bread and curry bread.

Honestly speaking, it wasn’t nearly enough, but I couldn’t be greedy either. There’s a new CD coming out from a band I love, so I can’t spend my money recklessly. Restraint is the word.

“Then, I’ll get the yakisoba bread, chocolate horns...as well as some croquette and curry bread, some kushikatsu² and menchi katsu³... And, some milk.” Konoe bought what looked like a mountain of bread and other dishes.

Even the old lady at the store had her eyes open in shock in the face of that. She had the face like a mother who had finally met the son she had to give away because she had been in debt.

Either way, we finished our shopping trip, and headed up to the rooftop. Originally, using this place was forbidden, but this is pretty much the only place I could think of that would give us some tranquility. Maybe in the corner of the courtyard, but the windows above the second floor had us in plain sight. If some fans of Konoe were to see us, they might just snipe at me.

When we arrived at the door leading out to the rooftop, it wasn't locked. Lucky, huh. With a rusty sound, the door opened, and a comfortable spring breeze hit my cheeks, together with the sun warming my skin. It seems like this morning's rain had vanished entirely.

Yeah, not bad. The scenery was refreshing, and no other people were around. I felt a little bit relieved. Made me want to do a Hopack. I chose to sit down on the foundation of a fence in the corner of the rooftop. Now then, it's time to eat. Humans really need a regular meal, or they will rot. With these thoughts, I opened up the plastic wrapper around my croquette bread.

“.....”

Konoe stood still, her eyes wandering all over the place. She seemed restless about something. She's not wary of a possible sniper, is she?

“What are you doing? Come on, have a seat.”

“...”

“Hey now, don't ignore me. You were the one who invited me, remember?”

“Urk...Alright, I get it. I just have to sit down, right.” Konoe awkwardly sat down next to me, and started silently munching on her bread.

As always, her expression had absolutely no emotion. It's like she's a stray cat. She's wary of me like crazy.

“Oh right, are you sure about leaving Suzutsuki alone? Aren’t you her butler?”

Since staying silent all the time would have been too awkward, I just asked a random question I came up with. However, all I got back was silence. She’s not even planning to return the ball.

“Hey, at least try to keep up a conversation, alright. We’re eating lunch together, you know.”

“Shut up, pervert.”

She fully cut off any ongoing conversation. Nothing more to talk about for us. How cruel. Send in another pitcher, will you. Rather than this being a catchball conversation, the liner was sent back already.

“Listen...I already apologized for what happened this morning. Not to mention that I wasn’t wearing my glasses, so I barely saw anything.”

“No excuses. And, I usually eat alone anyway, so I’m not practiced in talking during lunch break.”

“You...We are eating lunch together right now. Or, are you like this with Suzutsuki as well?”

“.....”

No response, yet again. Hey now, did I hit bulls-eye or something? Oh yeah, I never see Suzutsuki and Konoe really talk with each other either. They are often together, but it’s really like they’re master and servant, only talking when absolutely necessary.

“I am the young lady’s butler. As long as I can fulfill my job, I’m happy.”

“Job?”

“That’s right, to protect the young lady is my duty, and my only duty.”

“Duty, huh...”

Rather than being a butler, she's more of a bodyguard. If she's only protecting Suzutsuki, then it would make sense that they're not talking, but...they're the same age. It wouldn't hurt to get along a bit more, right.

"Then, let's at least talk now. Eating lunch while talking is much more fun, right?"

At the very least, that's how I feel. Eating without talking a word just makes me lose my appetite.

"...Do you always eat together with someone else?"

"Yeah, mostly with Kurose. We've known each other since middle school."

"Middle school, huh. I never attended it, so I don't really get it."

I almost dropped the croquette from my bread when I heard that.

"...What? You never went to middle school?"

"Yep, both the young lady and I only started attending high school. We never went to either grade school or middle school. We were only students by name, but never attended a single class. That was the decision made for the both of us."

When she says decision, it must have come from the Suzutsuki Family, huh. I really don't get how rich people tick. Of course they'd treasure their child, but isn't this a bit too protective?

"That's why, when I first came to this school, I didn't know left from right. The young lady is wise and clever, so she could fit in fairly quickly, but that was impossible for me." Konoe said, as she munched on some chocolate horn.

Impossible, huh... I don't blame her. Just imagining what she went through, I felt a chill run down my back. I can enjoy my current high school life because I have friendships supporting me, but that's probably because I got used to making friends in grade and middle school.

However, Konoe did not have any of that. It's like you sent a student driver onto the highway during their first practical lesson. They'd probably end up terrified and step on the brakes right away. Thinking about it that way, I kind of feel bad for Konoe now.

"That's why, I never ate lunch together with friends like you do." Konoe muttered with a meek voice.

"...Name."

"Eh?"

"Ah, well..." Crap, I just opened my mouth before I thought about it. "Just call me by my name. Even I call you 'Konoe', right? My name is Sakamachi Kinjrou. If it's too long, then Jirou is fine. The other guys from class and Suzutsuki are doing the same, right?"

Thinking about it, Konoe has called me by my name only once so far. I kinda don't want that. Makes me feel like she's against me.

"But...are you sure about that?"

"About what?"

"Addressing you like we're friends...do you not hate that?"

"You're a troublesome one, huh. Jirou has been my nickname for years now. Any other way just feels off to me, so don't hold back."

"But, we're only eating lunch together..."

"Eat together, talk about whatever comes to mind, that's what friends do."

There's no definition of what it means to be friends. Well, being friends with someone so unfriendly isn't exactly in my best interest, but whatever. A bit of silence followed, as Konoe seemed to be lost in thought.

"...Alright. I-I'll call you that way then...J-Jirou..." While her cheeks were turning into a faint red, she said my name with an embarrassed tone.

For a moment, I cursed my own foolishness...Damn, how can she be this cute. That's Subaru-sama for you. She's not known as the school's number one hottie just for show. I was about to be entranced by her.

"Y-Yeah, sounds good." I tried to hide my own embarrassment, but stumbled over my words.

When I looked to my side, Konoe was repeating the same 'Jirou... Jirou...' to herself. See, you can do it—Is what I thought, when Konoe's head suddenly bumped into my shoulder.

"Hm? Are you sleepy?"

Looking over, I saw Konoe tried to gulp down a yawn, her eyes blinking a few times.

"...No, I'm not. I'm not sleepy."

Or so she said, but she was clearly attacked by drowsiness, as her head bopped back and forth as she tried to stay awake.

"You can sleep a bit. I'll wake you up once we need to go back."

"...I don't need your consideration. This kind of sleepiness is nothing for me—" She said, but the second she closed her eyes, I heard faint and rhythmic breathing from her.

It seems like her consciousness couldn't win against the temptation. Well, with such great weather we're having, it's hard not to feel relaxed. Her limb body leaned against me, allowing me to see her beautiful profile even more clearly. Yeah, she really is cute...

"...I keep forgetting."

Because she's wearing a male uniform, it's hard to keep it in mind, but Konoe is actually a girl. It seems like a part of me still sees Konoe as a boy. That's why I act so casual around her as well. Then again, this consciousness helps me to avoid getting a nosebleed at least.

As I was thinking about that, the door of the rooftop opened. The person who appeared gave Konoe leaning against me a dubious gaze.



“What a rare sight.” A female student with long glossy hair appeared, and approached us—It was Suzutsuki.

She must have come to check on us. I’m surprised she knew we were here. Maybe she put some weird tracking device on us.

“Fufu, sound asleep, isn’t she. It’s quite rare for Subaru to sleep next to others.”

“Is it really?”

“It feels like I’m driving through the capital on my Harley and spotting an Iriomote cat.”

What kind of example is that? I can get the nuance of how rare this was, but I don’t see that kind of emotion at all. She’s as much of a cool beauty as always. She feels more like an adult than a girl my age. Makes sense why I can’t calm down with her around.

“I’m sure that all her tension was blown away.”

“Tension? Oh yeah, Konoe’s been weird all day. So she was nervous? But, why?”

Maybe someone’s aiming at us after all? If so, then we need to escape quickly.

“Why...? It’s because she’s meeting with you after all.”

“Huh?”

What’s up with that? Why would she be worried about meeting me? I’m not Golgo 13⁴.

“Talking to you puts a lot of stress on Subaru, you know. She couldn’t sleep all night yesterday.”

“...But, isn’t this normal?”

“Normal? For you, probably. To Subaru, this is a first in everything. Going to school with someone, talking and having lunch, she never did any of that with someone except me. All because she wanted to make friends, but couldn’t.”

“It’s true that Konoe doesn’t have any friends, but...”

Couldn’t she have just made some friends then? Even if she only started attending school now a year ago, she should be getting used to it by now...right?

“There’s a difference between not having any and being unable to

make any. Subaru has a secret she has to hide from everyone, and you should know what I'm talking about."

"...Ah."

I finally grasped the meaning behind Suzutsuki's words. Konoe has to protect her secret from the people around her. In order to properly do that, what is necessary? It's simple—Don't get involved with others.

"Subaru is practically obsessed with being my butler. So, she does everything necessary for others to not find out about her secret. That's why she never tries to get close to anybody at school but me. Because she's terrified of others finding out." Suzutsuki said it with a blank tone, but I'm sure it must be painful for Konoe.

She wants friends, but cannot make any because of the secret she has to keep. Thus, she's alone in class...I see, so she wasn't alone by choice.

"To Subaru, I am her master. I don't think she will be able to call me a friend. Well, a long time ago, we were close enough that she'd call me 'Kana-chan', but...Now, Subaru has finally made a friend here at this school." Suzutsuki smiled. "Jirou-kun, since you've already found out her secret, you can become her friend. She must have been nervous because this was her first time talking with a classmate, but she tried her best so that she wouldn't lose this precious chance."

"....."

What, so she wanted to be friends with me...What an idiot, she should just be honest about that.

"Personally speaking, I'm quite happy about this. Being on the side of those who gave her the chance."

"Oh yeah, you gave Konoe the order to stay close to me, right."

"Naturally, I am thankful to you as well."

"...Stop that, it's embarrassing."

"Fufu, you get flustered easily, I see. For that, I'll give you

something.”

“...? What is this?”

I looked at the small piece of paper that I was given. Is this...some ticket? But, for what?

“If I were to give it a name, it would be like a butler ticket. It’s like a ticket for a shoulder massage. If you were to use this, you can give Subaru any kind of order you want.”

“Order...”

“If you were to wish for it, you could have Subaru take off her upper clothes until she’s completely naked, pour some honey on her breasts, and make her say ‘Please lick me clean’, you know? You have the chance to ask for anything perverted.”

“I don’t have any interests like those!”

“Quiet. Wouldn’t want to wake up Subaru, right?”

“Urk...”

“Well, if you don’t want to use it, then that’s fine. This is just my token of gratitude.” Suzutsuki showed a polite bow.

She really is a rich lady, she knows the gestures at her disposal. Well, leaving that aside.

“Hey, let me ask one thing.”

“What?”

“The picture drawn on this butler ticket...what is this?”

I took a glance at the ticket in my hand. Shown on there was a print of a four-legged living being holding an odd shape.

“Ah, that’s the picture of a sheep that I drew. It doesn’t hurt to draw something silly for once, right.”

“A sheep...”

This is? This avant-garde monster that resembles a rice ball? You kidding, right? What kind of new style is this supposed to be? Even Picasso or Guernica were easier to decipher.

“Not half bad, don’t you think? I’ve always wanted to be an artist ever since I was young, you see. Well, I had to cast that aside because I had to inherit my family.”

“Huh...that is a shame.”

What a shame, really. If we had let this talent of hers flourish, she might have actually gotten to taste the strictness and unfairness of society.

“Ah, that reminds me. There’s a rumour going on around in class. About you and Subaru, see.”

“Urk.”

“Fufu. Then, let us meet after school. I’m looking forward to it.”
Suzutsuki left behind a smile, and walked away.

Saying what she wants and then running, huh...Now I’m terrified to go back to the classroom. From the side, I heard weird mumbling along the lines of ‘Ehehe...Kana-chan...I can’t eat anymore...’, together with a blissful sleeping face. She must have been dreaming about some long time ago. Ahh, if possible, I’d love to travel the world of my own dreams as well.

Thinking about how I could avoid the trouble that was about to befall me, I let out a defeated sigh.

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Let me start from the conclusion. I guess I was lucky enough, but the things I expected to befall me did in fact not happen. I really anticipated to get stabbed in the stomach by a female classmate, saying something along the lines of ‘Ahaha, this is your fault, Jirou-kun. It’s because you dared to lay your hands on Subaru-sama...’, but the class showed no reaction after me and Konoe came back. If anything, the silence was creeping me out.

Asking Kurose about this, he called it something like the calm before the storm. Pretty much the entire school already knows about the fact of me and Konoe having eaten lunch together. Apparently, the greatest Konoe fanclub called S4 already sent out a surprise attack squad, but another organization cut between them. Their name was something like ‘Watch over Subaru-sama with a warm gaze committee’, which is an independent faction from the S4. This group apparently moves under the desire to watch over Konoe’s reaction and feelings first, and then take action.

What, so Konoe’s fanclub has some normal people in there, huh—Is what I thought, but the members of this ‘Watch over Subaru-sama with a warm gaze committee’ apparently...are girls with a peculiar interest. Namely, they are fujoshi...They enjoy the whole boys-love genre. What terrified me the most is that they already have ideas for doujinshi and such based on scenarios between me and Konoe. What do you mean ‘warm gaze’? It’s scorching hot.

Well, long story short, there’s two factions holding a cold war. I bet some insane dispute will break out soon enough, but until then, I’m safe at least. I’m relieved, but I feel so complicated. It feels like I’ve become a colony in the middle of the second World War. Thankfully enough, the boys in the class were remaining spectators for that spectacle. Then again, just as Kurose said, they weren’t that confident that I had this kind of relationship with Konoe. Though, Kurose blurted out some nonsense like ‘You kissed already?’, so I rammed my fist into his stomach.

Time passed, and classes ended for the day. That’s right, it was time for the battle. Finally, Suzutsuki Kanade’s special program with the goal to cure my gynophobia will be put into action.

“—So, why are we at the game center, Suzutsuki?” With my phone in hand, I gave Suzutsuki a call.

‘Oh my, would you have preferred a hotel instead? I thought that this should be enough for your first date, see.’ She spoke in a carefree voice, like this wasn’t any of her business.

I seriously felt like cursing the person across the call. If someone can teach me how to pull that off, please tell me. This world will be a

better place without this selfish rich lady in it.

‘I told you before, right. This phobia came into existence because of your fear towards women. So, in order to erase this fear, you need to get used to girls.’

That’s why she forced us to go on a date like this, huh. Currently, Konoe and I stood in front of a game center located in the town next to where our academy was located. As soon as classes for the day came to an end, Suzutsuki sent us here. Well, it’s a good idea that we didn’t go to the game center close to our school. If someone saw us, they might write our names into that one shinigami’s note, you know.

But without beating around the bush, I am currently on a date with Subaru-sama. I’m shocked Konoe came all the way out here. I get that this is Suzutsuki’s order, but going on a date with me after insulting me and screaming how much she hated me just yesterday...Maybe she has a special reason.

“Oh yeah, where are you even right now, Suzutsuki?” I asked the person on a call with me.

When I came here, Konoe (with a sports bag down her shoulder) was waiting for me, nobody else.

‘I’m sitting at a nearby manga cafe, reading ‘Jo*o’s Bizarre Adventure’, so I won’t be getting in your way.’

What a wonderful mindset, indeed. I actually want to read Jo*o myself right now.

‘Now, why don’t you two get this started. Subaru, begin by touching Jirou-kun’s body.

“Understood, young lady.” With careful movement, Konoe’s fingers reached for my arm.

It felt like she was trying to disarm a timebomb. Eventually, Konoe’s fingers touched my fingertips.

‘And, how is it?’

“What do you mean?”

‘Are you getting horny?’

“As if I would! How desperate do you think I am!?”

‘Odd...I should have mixed some into the bread at the school store.’

“What did you try to mix in there!?”

‘Buf*erin.’

“Buf*erin!? Why would you add household medicine in there!?”

‘I mean, you’re a human being in today’s day and age, so your heart must need healing as well, right? That’s why, you need the kindness of buf*erin.’

“Why’d this suddenly get all serious!?”

‘An acquaintance of mine drank buf*erin, and grew a whole 5cm, and there’s others who stopped being shut-ins and became fully-fledged members of society.’

“I bet that isn’t even related to the buf*erin at all!”

‘—Kindness can save the world.’

“Don’t try to forcefully smush some stupid moral play in here!” I screamed into my phone, as I heard cracking from it.

That was close. A bit more, and I might have crushed it out of anger.

‘Well, leaving aside the jabs.’

Those were jabs? What kind of impact and strength does your straight have, then? I’m worried.

‘How is it, Jirou-kun? Did your nose start bleeding?’

“...? No, it seems to be fine.” I rubbed my face, but saw no red.

‘That is quite odd. You are being touched by a girl right now, aren’t

you.'

"Ah..."

That's right. Even though Konoe—a girl touched me, my body showed no reaction. There's no sign of my nose starting to bleed either.

'I knew it. Somewhere deep inside your heart, you don't see Subaru as a girl yet. That's why your phobia doesn't show any reaction. And, we'll use that.' Suzutsuki paused, and continued. 'We'll start the mission. Subaru, get to stripping.'

"Understood, young lady."

"Hold on a damn secoooooooooooooooooond!?" I pushed my body forward, retorting at the top of my lungs.

'What's wrong, Jirou-kun. This is for your sake, remember?'

"Shut up! We've jumped several steps here! What are you making your butler do in broad daylight, huh!?"

Telling her to strip with so many people around...What is she thinking...! Did she get hit in the head by some heat-seeking missile?

'What are you talking about? Who said that Subaru had to strip in the open?'

"Eh?"

When I looked towards Konoe, she walked inside the game center. Does she have to strip inside of there? I feel like she'd get arrested for public indecency...

'No need to worry. She'll be changin inside the toilet.'

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

'Fufu, the plan is perfect. You're not completely conscious of Subaru being a girl. That is just so very convenient. If you suddenly went on a date with a normal girl, the stimulus would be too great, I would

assume.'

"I get that. You're telling me to gradually get used to it, right."

It's like the safety wheels with a bicycle. First, I have to become aware of Konoe as a girl, and then get used to being around and interacting with a girl.

"But, why would you have Konoe strip?"

'You'll understand it right away. More importantly—'

"More importantly?"

'Just make sure not to faint out of shock, okay?'

"What?"

I had no idea what she was talking about. However, after waiting for a few moments, I fully grasped it. Konoe walked out from the game center, wearing the girls' uniform from Rouran Academy.

"—!"

Crap, this really makes me feel dizzy. S-She's so cute...! From beneath her uniform's skirt, I could see her slender legs. Because she wore kneesocks, this beauty was only emphasized. She kept her hair open, only wearing a ribbon on them, which made her look even more feminine. No seriously, it looked too good. Like she was born to wear this uniform, almost.

'It seems like Subaru came back. And, how is it? Still conscious?'

"Yeah...somewhat."

I see, so that's what the sports bag was for. To think she'd bring a change of clothes with her.

"How do I say this...I feel like her chest is bigger than before..." I whispered in a voice so that Konoe wouldn't be able to hear it.

'It's a corset. Normally, Subaru wears a corset to cover her breasts.

Not like that matters much though. Not to mention that she should be wearing a bra with padding.’

“Huh, really now...”

But, wait? Isn’t a corset pretty stiff? I feel like when I touched her chest yesterday, it was oddly soft...

‘By the way, Subaru actually forgot to wear her corset yesterday. That’s why, when you touched her in the science room yesterday—’

“Wait. Stop right there, Suzutsuki. No more than that.”

Memories surfacing inside my head were battling my reason. It feels like the battle of Dan-no-Ura is happening inside my head. You can do it, my reason. If you lose, then I’ll lose my ground as a human being.

‘Now, continue the mission. You’ll be going on a date in the game center with the current Subaru. If something happens, make sure to contact me.’

“H-Hold on! Don’t you dare hang up now!”

Being left alone with the current Konoe was far too dangerous. With how she’s changed, I can only see her as a girl right now. Or rather, she is one. Rather than getting used to it, I might just color the game center in blood red...!

‘Do your best. I can’t leave here right now.’

“What, did something happen at the manga cafe?”

‘Indeed, this is a very special moment. Right now, Nara*cia just entered Gior*o’s⁵ body, and...’

“For now, why don’t you stop reading Jo*o, hm!?”

I mean, I was about to cry at that scene as well. But, how cruel can you be? That rich lady is enjoying life in a manga cafe. She even had the guts to cut the call, that Devil Suzutsuki. She prioritized manga over me.

“Hey...Jirou, does this not...look weird?” Konoe asked me, pulling down her skirt.

“N-No, it...looks great on you.”

As proof of that, she started to gather attention from the people around us. I’m really glad that nobody we knew was around.

“R-Really? The thing is...I actually wanted to wear these clothes at least once.” Her skirt fluttered, as Konoe happily twirled on the spot.

She might have always wanted to wear female clothing like this, but didn’t have the time as she was living as a boy.

“Now, let’s go. We’re going to fix your phobia now.” Subaru-sama seemed quite energetic, as she walked towards the entrance of the game center.

I followed her, and entered inside...But seriously, isn’t this just going to make my phobia even worse?

“Jirou, what is that?”

Right after we entered, Konoe’s gaze was glued to the crane games. This might be her first time coming to a game center.

“It’s a UFO catcher. If you put money inside, you can try to get the prizes.”

“Oho.”

She clearly wasn’t listening to my explanation. Like a girl admiring a wedding dress, she merely stared through the glass case. When I glanced inside the case, I spotted a plush toy with the name of ‘Silent Sheep’.

“.....”

Hey now, are you sure about this? It’s a cute plush toy of a sheep, but for some reason, it had sharp teeth resembling a shark. Not to mention that it had some of these red ones on its mouth. For some reason, it looked like that certain professor from a certain movie.

“...How cute...”

Hm, seems like she's taken a liking to it. She might be more feminine than I previously imagined. Her sense is a bit over the top though. Since she was absorbed in it, I asked her 'Should I get it?', to which Konoe nodded. Since I hadn't been practicing for a while, I was out of touch and it cost me 1000 yen, but I finally succeeded in getting the plush toy, and gave it to Konoe.

“Waaah...so cute...”

Yeah, cute indeed. You, specifically. Just by getting to see your smile, I feel like spending those 1000 yen was totally worth it. With that, I can say goodbye to the CD I was supposed to buy this month. I have to be careful to not make this a habit.

“...Hm?”

Thinking about it that far, I remembered the existence of something. I put my hand in my pocket, and took out a single ticket. The butler ticket I was given by Suzutsuki. Can I actually use this?

“Say, Konoe. Do you know what this is?”

Konoe was happily hugging her plush toy, only for her expression to freeze up as soon as she saw the ticket.

“Impossible...Why do you have that?”

“Why...Suzutsuki gave it to me. More importantly, if I use this, you have to listen to my orders, correct?”

“.....” The dear Butler-kun grew silent, her face pale.

Hmm, it seems like that was right after all. What should I do, I might as well use it now...Um, according to the explanation on the ticket, the second I rip it apart, we'll enter a master and servant contract. So, I ripped it apart, to which Konoe showed a dissatisfied smile.

“—H-How can I serve you, dear master.”

“.....”

.....Well, how do I say this. I didn't expect this kind of impact. I was called a master by a girl my age. Not good, I might tread upon a path I can never return from.

“So, you're my butler right now, aren't you.”

“...! Y-Yes, it is just as you say, dear master.” Konoe's eyelids were quivering.

It seems like she hates the idea of being ordered around by anybody but Suzutsuki. Well, I don't want to ask for the impossible, so...

“Can you go ‘Baaa’ like a sheep?”

“Huh?” Konoe looked like she was unable to comprehend the order she received from her master.

“I want you to make a sound like a sheep. You like sheeps, right? Should be simple.”

“~~~!”

After a brief silence, her lips started quivering, slowly followed by her entire body. And then, as she was tearing up—

“B-Baaaaa~”

Like a sheep terrified of a wolf, she howled. It was a realistic reenactment...I wonder why, I feel like I did something I never should have as a human being. As it looks like, Konoe might love sheep, but she definitely does not enjoy copying them. If anything, she looks at me like I just killed her parents...

“...Dear master.”

“W-What? I used up the butler ticket, so you can go back to normal.”

“—No no no, what are you saying. I am dear master's butler, remember?”

“...!”

T-This is bad! She's smiling at me, but her eyes are dead!

"Ah, dear master. You have some dust on your head."

"!? S-Stop, Konoe! I can take it off myself!"

Konoe suddenly closed the distance between us. My goose bumps were giving a standing ovation. Konoe's face was right in front of me, reaching a distance where kissing was a single move away.

"What's wrong, master. Shaking like that. Are you cold? Should I warm you up?" She whispered in my ear.

Not good, It feels stingy inside my nose. I can feel the nosebleed coming already.

"I-I'm sorry! I went too far! I'll apologize! I'm very sorry that I made you act like an herbivorous animal! That's why, don't come any closer than this! At this rate, I'll fai—"

"Rest assured, dear master." My butler showed the beautiful smile of a saint. "Do you think you would be forgiven merely because you fainted?"

Ahh...It seems like the real punishment awaits me after I'm out cold. At the very least, I hope I don't wake up hanging upside down from the ceiling or something like that. However, right as I thought that, something happened.

"Gyaha!?"

An impact shook my body. Like a missile had landed a direct impact on me, my body was flung away. I wasn't even given much time to show surprise, as my body just rolled along the floor of the game center. My field of view was spinning. The person who landed a beautiful dropkick onto my cranium—that girl with befitting short hair—stuck a magnificent landing.

Indeed, it was Sakamachi Kureha. My little sister appeared on this stage, I definitely would not mistake her.

"K-Kureha! What are you doing here?!" I fixed my glasses, and

screamed.

My neck felt stiff, and hurt a lot. If she did that on any normal person, they might have dislocated a bone.

“That’s my phrase, Nii-san...!” Kureha’s voice was quivering in anger. “I heard some weird rumour at school...that you’re going out with a boy. I thought that had to be impossible, but I followed you here all the way from school.”

“Followed...you were tailing me!?”

What are you, a stalker? I can’t laugh about that, alright.

“Yeah, and then...I found you doing this. How about you say something, Konoe-senpai?”

Hearing these words, Konoe’s body twitched in shock. Crap, we messed up. No matter how you look at it, Konoe definitely is the perfect image of a girl. Everybody would realize by just looking at her...that the very Subaru-sama is actually a girl...!

“To think you had this kind secret hiding...I’m surprised.” Kureha pointed at Konoe like she was some sort of detective.

And then, she declared.

“I would have never imagined...that you were a pervert who enjoyed wearing female clothing!”

“““Wha?”””

Konoe’s and my voice overlapped, utterly dumbfounded...Oh man, I’m so glad my little sister is an idiot. It seems like we somehow managed to avoid the worst case scenario.

“I thought something was off when you came to our house this morning! You thieving cat! You’re trying to seduce Nii-san, right!”

“Wha, what are you talking about, you moron! That’s not—”

“You be quiet, Nii-san.” Kureha was breathing like a wild dog,

breaking between my words. “Everything...I’ve seen through everything, you know? You gave the crossdressing Konoe-senpai a plush toy as a present, and your bodies were close enough to hug... And, as the final trigger...!” She started tearing up. “A kiss...you two men were about to kiss each other!”

...It’s over. Something deep inside of my heart told me so. Now that I think about it, Kureha always was the type to get the wrong impression about something. Judging from my experiences, no matter what I say or try to explain, she won’t listen—and grow rampant.

“Konoe-senpai...Even if you are this cute...and the number one hottie at our school...I can’t believe you tried to seduce my Nii-san...!”

It truly felt like I was watching a timebomb slowly counting down to doom.

“Give...Give me back my Nii-san—!”

Thus, she exploded. At the same time as she roared, she started running towards Konoe like a bullet shot out of a gun.

“Urk, Konoe! Be careful she’s—”

Right as I wanted to warn Konoe, she had started moving herself. It was probably some sort of defensive reaction. As Kureha came dashing towards her with a straight line, Konoe tried to counter that with her left fist—

“Naive!”

Kureha easily evaded Konoe’s fist. She followed up by grabbing Konoe’s wrist, leaping at her to seal her legs. I think this technique is called back-lying perpendicular armbar. Since I was her training tool, I’ve experienced this myself.

—Submission. Kureha was trying to rapture Konoe’s elbow. Konoe herself lost her balance, and fell to the ground. The rest was simple. Kureha simply had to stretch the arm she had power over, and break Konoe’s elbow...!

“How is this! This is the true strength of Rouran Academy’s

handicrafts club!” Kureha screamed, sure of her victory.

No, any normal member of the handicrafts club wouldn’t be able to pull off such an attack! I really wanted to retort on that, but I found myself unable. That’s Kureha for you, she didn’t use me these past years for nothing. At this rate, she might really break Konoe’s arm—

“I”

Right as I thought that Kureha had stood victorious, it happened. Konoe’s body turned around like a snake. Surprisingly enough, Konoe pushed her body forward, and used the force of the rotation to forcefully break free from Kureha’s lock.

“Eh—”

Kureha’s face was distorted in shock. She must have not expected Konoe to easily break free from this lock, as she was left baffled, lacking behind with a reaction. And, Konoe used that moment—with a middle kick. Right as Kureha wanted to get up, a fierce kick aimed directly at her face.

“Kya!?”

She somehow managed to cross her arms and block the attack. However, the impact of the kick had her small body blow into the distance.

“H-Hey! Kureha!?” I ran towards my little sister, who collapsed on the ground.

Her expression was distorted in shock, as she laid on the ground in the shape of a 大 character. Looking at her, she didn’t seem to have suffered any injuries, and the biggest damage she received was from the fact that Konoe managed to escape her deadlock.

“W-What...is this...” She muttered, and then. “This...this isn’t fair!” She started screaming, and ran away from the game center.

Both Konoe and I could only watch this in confusion.

♀ × ♂

“Sorry about that, Jirou...I didn’t mean to kick her that hard.”

Having changed back to her usual male clothes, Konoe was clearly dejected. After Kureha ran away, we both left the game center ourselves. Or rather, we ran away. We couldn’t exactly stay behind after causing that level of a ruckus.

Right now, we’re on the way home. Suzutsuki and Konoe’s path coincidentally overlapped with mine, so we ended up going together.

“Don’t be so depressed about it. You wouldn’t have been able to stop Kureha otherwise.”

In fact, if Konoe wasn’t trained in self-defence, things would have ended badly. Her body might be on the way to the hospital at this point. Not to mention that Kureha should be fine even with that kind of attack.

“Well, I will take responsibility if your little sister were to awaken to some odd interest thanks to Subaru’s kick.”

“Shut up, Suzutsuki.”

Don’t say that like it’d be some logical conclusion. Whose fault do you think this is in the first place. Ahh, I’m terrified of going home. I bet Kureha must be fuming right now.

“Haa, guess I’ll have to fix Kumagorou again.”

“...Kumagorou? What’s that?” Konoe asked, seemingly confused.

“Ah, it’s the bear-shaped plush toy Kureha had ever since she was a brat. She often brings it close to destroying it, so I have to fix it a lot.”

“I see, so even she has something cute like that. She is a girl after all.”

“.....”

...I can’t tell her. In reality, Kumagorou is pretty much Kureha’s punching bag whenever I’m not at home. Because of this, that plush

toy ends up in tatters a lot, in a shape where it wouldn't be weird to just throw it into the burnable trash, but I've repaired it again and again. Rather than a plush toy, it feels more like a comrade in arms. Both Kumagorou and I had been fighting on the battlefield called Sakamichi Family for years now.

"Alright, see you at school tomorrow."

Reaching my house, I split up with the other two. My home is like any other you could find—not necessarily, to be honest. From the outside, it looks like an average residential home, but below the ground was a dojo and a gym.

There, Kureha and I would often receive close-combat training from Mom when we were younger. Then again, I was always the first one to give up. A crimson red sports car stood in the garage, but this is also just another hobby of Mom. What kind of street racer are you.

I unlocked the front door. This is where the real battle begins. I need to properly explain the situation to her. I bet it's going to take a broken bone to convince her.

"...She might actually break my bones, yeah." Muttering terrifying words to myself, I opened the door, only to be greeted with utter darkness inside.

...Weird, Kureha should have come home by now. With these thoughts, I turned on the lights in the hallway—Only to spot the aforementioned bear plush toy, slaughtered.

"Eeeek!" I couldn't hold back a terrified shriek.

That poor plush toy—or rather, the pieces of it—were scattered inside the hallway, creating the scenery of a massacre. It's Kumagorou. Oh crap, it seems like Kureha is going crazy as much as the current stock market in Japan. This atrocious scenery tells me enough. What kind of technique did he have to suffer through to end up like this. This has reached levels of fixing him being impossible. And, I happened to meet eyes with his emotionless plastic eyes.

'—Live on.'

...! Unbelievable. This has to be a hallucination. A plush toy should not be able to speak like that, and yet it felt like it was directly talking to me.

“K-Kumagorouuuuuuuuu!”

Ahh...farewell, my beloved comrade in arms. If you are given the right to be reborn, I at least hope you become a rat plush toy, and be beloved by all the children in this world. I gave my farewell to Kumagorou, and shed a passionate tear.

“...Nii-san.”

“K-Kureha!?”

Hearing a familiar voice behind my back, I turned around, and found Kureha standing there. She was still wearing her uniform.

“Welcome back.”

“Y-Yeah, I’m home...”

Huh? She’s much more calm and collected than I thought she’d be. Compared to that, she was lacking her usual energy. I guess the shock of losing against Konoe must have been big.

“Nii-san...can I ask you one thing?”

“W-What is it?”

Hearing my little sister with such a serious tone, I couldn’t help but be terrified. She’s not going to ask for a testament or anything, right. My next words might be my last...Ahaha. I shouldn’t laugh about that.

“Nii-san...are you and Konoe-senpai going out?”

“N-No, we’re just friends. Not to mention that we’re both boys, so.”

“...I see. That makes sense. It was all just my misunderstanding. Ahh, I’m so glad.” Kureha sighed in relief.

Now, why is she blushing like that? Did she catch a cold by any chance?

“So...Nii-san, I need your advice on something.”

“Advice?”

“Yup...I actually...have someone I like.”

“...What?”

“This is the first time I’ve felt like this...So, I don’t know what to do.”

“...”

“The thing is...that person is actually your friend, Nii-san.” Kureha said, her cheeks turning red.

All my cells in my body were screaming. I got a horrible feeling about this. It’s like I’m on a sandy beach, a tsunami about to approach. This one’s a big wave...!

“So, about that...” Kureha fidgeted with her fingers, putting them together, and pulling me away. “Do you know if Konoe-senpai is currently going out with someone?”

“I-I don’t think he is?”

“I see...Ehehe.” Kureha smiled happily. “The thing is...”

“W-What is it, my little sister?”

“Because of that kick before...my heart skipped a beat.”

“H-Huh...”

“Konoe-senpai is so strong, and cool.”

“W-Well, I guess...”

“I—fell in love with him.”

“.....”

Oh lord help me. Dear father up in the heavens, your daughter fell in love with a girl.

- 1 Stepover Toehold Facelock
- 2 Deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables
- 3 Fried cake of minced meat
- 4 A game reference: Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode
- 5 A reference to Jojo Part 5

Chapter 3: The Girl's Melancholy

“Ahahahahahaha.”

The following day, during lunch break, I found myself up on the rooftop. Beneath the clear blue sky, Suzutsuki laughed at the top of her lungs. She held her stomach to bear with the pain, and didn't even bother to control her voice.

“Don't laugh. This is a serious problem.”

If possible, I'd laugh myself. How can I even believe this nonsense? Kureha fell in love with Konoe...

“See, it's just as I said. Being kicked by Subaru, your little sister awakened to some odd interest.”

“Stop with that. At this rate, the stress will open up a hole in my stomach.”

That's right...all happened because of that single kick. Of course, it's not that she's suddenly a pervert who gets excited at being kicked.

‘I like people who are stronger than me.’

Thinking about it, Kureha always argued like that. However, the problem in this equation is that Kureha is a product of the Sakamachi Family—namely a prodigy in martial arts. As a result, she's been undefeated her entire life. No boy her age could ever win against her. And now, for the first time ever, she tasted defeat—against Konoe Subaru.

Because of Konoe's strength, her heart literally skipped a beat. However, the problem is...

“Why not? These two seem like a good match.”

“...Are you being serious right now?”

“A bit of an obstacle like that is nothing. They’ll overcome that with their love, right?”

“Please, don’t ask for any kind of approval. I didn’t call you here so that you tell me that kind of nonsense.”

Right now, Konoe isn’t with us...which makes sense, I could never tell Konoe about this. Hence, it was just me and Suzutsuki right now. If a boy saw us two alone here, I might get attacked on my nightly stroll, but I still needed to tell her. Before the situation can escalate.

“Kureha doesn’t know about Konoe’s secret. Or, are you fine about the two of them ending up in this kind of relationship?”

“It’s not rare to see this kind of romance as of lately, is it. There might be people with that kind of interest near you, and you wouldn’t even know.”

There aren’t. If an individual like that existed on this world, they’d be the rarest species on this planet. They’re probably living on the Galapagos Islands.

“Anyway, you need to help me out, Suzutsuki. You have responsibility in this case.”

“Responsibility?” Suzutsuki showed me a puzzled expression.

“That’s right...Didn’t you send Konoe to my place this morning again.”

“That I did. Any problem with that?”

“A big one, actually. Do you even know what you put me through...!”

“?” Suzutsuki tilted her head, to which I explained the incident a few hours prior.

That’s right, this morning, at the Sakamachi Family’s residence...a nightmarish tragedy occurred.

♀ × ♂

“Good morning, Nii-san.”

“Y-Yo, Kureha. What’s up, you’re missing a bit of your usual energy. Lacking some sleep?”

“Yep. My heart was racing all night, I couldn’t sleep.”

“.....”

“You’re looking a bit pale, Nii-san. Did you not catch enough sleep?”

“Yeah...My heart was racing all night, I couldn’t sleep.”

“Fueh? Why was your heart racing, Nii-san?”

“No, don’t worry about it...I was just worrying about some stuff. More importantly, go freshen up with a shower, I’ll take one after you.”

“Yup, thanks. I’ll use the bath first then.” Kureha left the living room, and headed towards the changing room.

Right after, I heard the front door opening.

“Morning, Jirou.”

“K-Konoe!? Why are you here!?”

“Hmpf, that’s so that we could go to—I mean, that I can properly observe you. Rather, you should properly lock the door. You’re too careless.”

“.....”

“? Why are you not saying anything? And what’s that complicated expression for? Is it a problem that I came here?”

“N-Not, of course not—”

“Nii-saaaan, we ran out of shampoo. Could you bring me a new bottle from the—” Kureha returned to the living room...half naked.

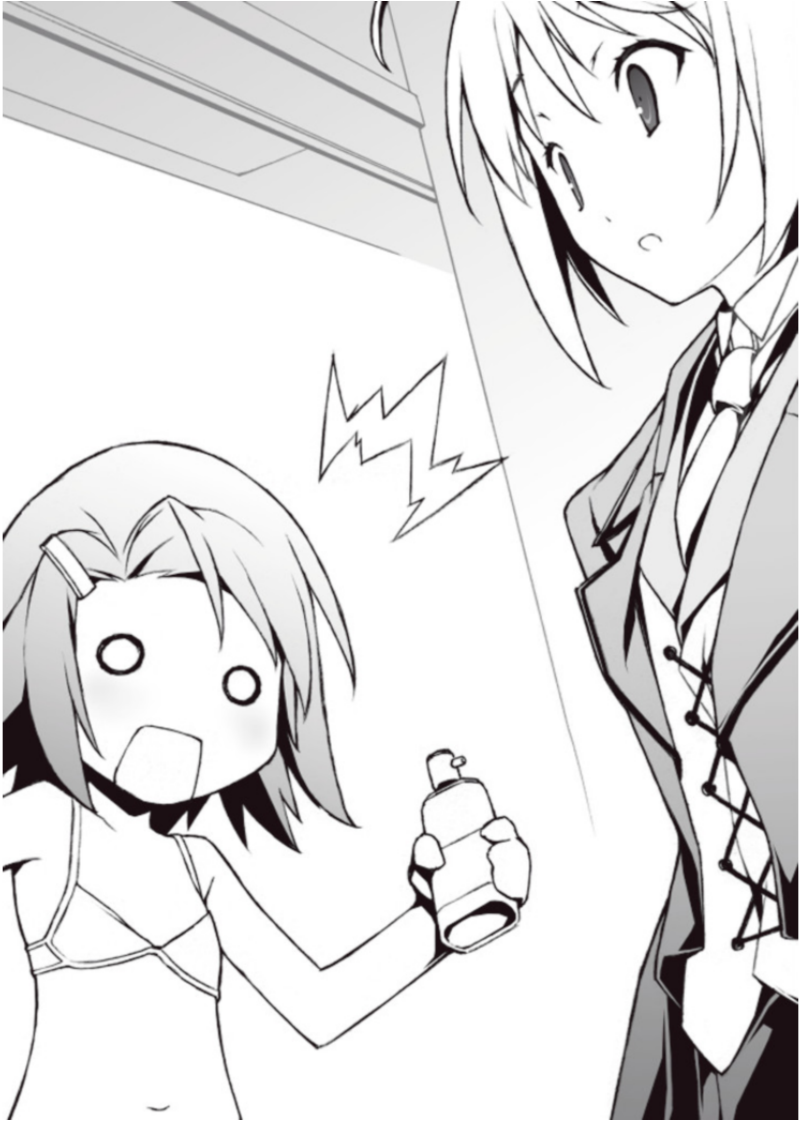
She must have been about to take a shower, as she was only wearing her underwear. Spotting the unexpected visitor, my little sister froze up.

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

The three of us grew silent. An awkward silence filled the room, only for Kureha's face to change colors like a traffic light, reaching a crimson red. Her shaking eyes were fixated on a single point. Naturally, that was none other than Konoe Subaru—



“Nyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?” A scream cut through the silence.

She raised a shriek like she was living through her last moments, and dashed out of the living room. If I had to guess, she was probably rushing to her room. Following that, silence returned to the living room.

End of the flashback. This is the summed up incident of the tragedy for a single girl that happened in the Sakamachi Household.

♀ × ♂

“Ahahahahahahahahaha!”

Hearing my story, Suzutsuki yet again broke out in laughter, as she teared up.

“Don’t laugh! You know how terrifying that was!?”

After that incident, no matter what I said, Kureha would not come out of her room. So, Konoe and I just headed to school ourselves.

“Will she be okay, I wonder. I hope she doesn’t lock herself up in her room.”

“I think you don’t need to worry about that.” Suzutsuki said with a fresh tone. “After all, she’s right over there.” She pointed behind me.

“What?” I turned around, and looked at the door of the rooftop.

From the opening of the door, I saw large eyes peeking at us.

“Ugh.” I let out a groan in the face of this scenery that could have come straight out of a horror movie.

The door opened, and familiar short-cut hair appeared. It was Kureha.

“I was searching for you, Nii-san.”

“Y-You, since when were you...”

“Just a second ago. More importantly, why are you together with someone famous like Suzutsuki-senpai, Nii-san?”

“.....”

“...If you don’t want to say it, then it’s fine. I already understand everything that’s going on.”

“Excuse me?”

She understands? What exactly?

“You actually...are dating Konoe-senpai, right.”

“Why are you always trying to push the conversation that way!”

Is her way of thinking connected to outer space? I thought she figured it out with that serious expression of hers, but she got the wrong idea again?

“I mean, that’s the only thing that makes sense to me. With what happened yesterday, and Konoe-senpai coming to pick you up this morning.”

“T-That’s...”

Urk, now that she mentions it. Maybe I really can’t blame her for thinking that way...

“Not to mention...it’s you after all.”

“Now hold on, what’s that supposed to mean!? What do you think of me!?”

“...BL?”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?”

How could this happen! My family...my own little sister thinks that I’m interested in guys!

“It’s fine, Nii-san. I’m trying my best to not have any prejudices towards people like that.”

“Stop! Don’t look at me like you’re some saint! I’m most definitely interested in girls!”

“Right...You like girls as well.”

“What do you mean ‘as well’, huh!? I only like girls.”

“Yes yes, I fully understand.”

“You clearly don’t! You don’t get anything!”

“...Then, what is going on? Explain it so I understand.”

“Urk...”

I’d love to explain it if I could. But, Suzutsuki is right here. I don’t know what would happen if I revealed the fact that Konoe is a girl to Kureha. She might brainwash us, or erase our memories. Terrified, I looked to my side, to which Suzutsuki let out a sigh.

“Very well. Now that it’s come to this, let’s tell her the truth.”

“S-Suzutsuki...”

“It can’t be helped. Trying to hide it won’t work now.” Suzutsuki faced Kureha, and her lips slowly formed the words. “Sakamachi-san, you’re not exactly wrong. Subaru—actually likes your older brother.”

“.....”

Now hold on. What are you talking about now, huh!?

“I figured.” Kureha nodded.

I wanted to disagree, but the shock wouldn’t let me fully use my mouth.

“But, rest assured. Jirou-kun and Subaru aren’t going out yet.”

“Eh, really...?”

“Of course. After all...” Suzutsuki took a quick break. “Jirou-kun is dating me after all.”

She said, leaving me absolutely baffled.

““What?””

It felt like a metal bat hit me on the back of my head. Kureha must have felt similar, because her eyes turned blank in shock.

“W-What...did you say just now...”

“Did you not hear me? I said that Jirou-kun and I are lovers. Subaru doesn’t know about this, though.”

“That’s...that’s impossible! I don’t believe that! Why would someone like Suzutsuki-senpai go out with Nii-san!?”

“Why...Am I not allowed to go out with a classmate of mine?”

“O-Of course, but...!” Kureha grit her teeth.

It seems like she’s still not fully convinced. Can’t blame her this time, even I’m utterly confused.

“This can’t be true! Without any proof, I won’t believe anything like that—”

“A birthmark on the side of this torso.”

Because of these words, Kureha took a step back, and froze up.

“Jirou-kun has a birthmark on the left side of his torso, right? The fact that I know about this is enough proof, isn’t it.”

“T-That’s...how do you?”

“Oh my, you’d like to know?” She let out a snicker. “It’s because I took off Jirou-kun’s clothes. Naturally, on top of a bed.” Suzutsuki-san said all of that without a change in expression.

She wasn’t even lying either. She did open up my clothes when I was laying on the bed in the infirmary. Not like anything more than that happened though. However, as my little sister doesn’t know about that, it made sense for her to blush.

“N-No way...on a bed...”

“I told you, didn’t I. Jirou-kun and I are dating. That’s why, isn’t that normal?”

“N-No way...Nii-san already...” Kureha’s eyes were spinning.

Of course, I was the same. I felt my knees being all wobbly.

“B-But...Nii-san should have problems being touched by women...”

“Don’t worry. With our love for each other, we can overcome any obstacle. At the very least, that’s what I believe.”

Suzutsuki’s words must have been quite the shock for Kureha, because she was about to run away. If I had a towel, I might throw it at her.

“But—that’s also why I want to support you.”

“...Eh?”

Suzutsuki changed her tone of voice, and continued with a more gentle one.

“I want Subaru to experience proper love with a girl. As his master, and Jirou-kun’s lover, I truly feel that way. That’s why...” From her pocket, she took out something that looked like a ticket.

This time, it wasn’t a butler ticket. Instead—it was a ticket for something like a leisure land that was recently built in the area. However, why does she have four of these?

“Let’s go there together on the upcoming Sunday.”

“Go there...and play?”

“Indeed. With you, Jirou-kun, Subaru, and me as the four of us. It’ll be like a double date, right? How does that sound?” Suzutsuki smiled at Kureha.

Standing there was undoubtedly Suzutsuki Kanade, the number one beauty at this school. She truly was the perfect image of a noble lady.

“Sakamachi-san...No, Kureha-chan, I want you to try your best, so I’ll be supporting you with everything I have. After all—you might become my little sister in the future.” Together with a flawless smile, Suzutsuki delivered the final hit.

The battle was decided. Her victory was undisputable.

“I understand, Suzutsuki-senpai...No, Onee-sama.” Kureha sounded like she had decided on something, and formed a fist with her hand. “I’ll definitely save Konoe-senpai from this dangerous path he’s treading upon!”

“Fufu, thank you very much, Kureha-chan. I have big expectations for you.”

Kureha and Suzutsuki exchanged a handshake. I feel like I was watching the birth of a bond inexplicable with words.....Well, how do I say this. Suzutsuki Kanade sure is one hell of a monster. With just that, she’s got perfect control over Kureha.

“So then, Onee-sama, I will go back to my classroom. I’m looking forward to Sunday!” Kureha waved her hand in energy and joy, and left the rooftop.

After watching her off, disappearing—

“...Hey, Suzutsuki.

“Yes, Jirou-kun?”

“That just now...”

“Of course, it was complete nonsense. I also happened to get these tickets by pure coincidence.”

She said it was no big deal at all. She’s a demon. She’s wearing the mask of an honor student, working as Devil Suzutsuki behind the scenes. Oh lord help me, dear priest, someone call an exorcist from the Vatican!

“What else was I supposed to do? At that rate, you might have spilled the beans about Subaru’s secret.”

“Well, yeah...But, the two of us going out is just...”

“Don’t worry about it. She doesn’t seem like the type who would tell others.”

I mean, she's not wrong in that, but...Will this really be fine? If Konoe finds out and thinks I laid my hands on her master, I might get a haircut with the guillotine...

"Not to mention...why are we going to that place?"

"I mean..." Suzutsuki let out a snicker. "It sounds interesting, doesn't it? This is the first time such an absurd situation happened for me. Ahh, I'm really looking forward to Sunday now."

"...Zat so."

I was pretty much half-baking it at this point. Though, I do feel like I've started to understand the human being called Suzutsuki now. Basically, she loves everything that sounds interesting and offers a laugh. Maybe she was longing for this kind of stuff as she's been a sheltered lady all this time. She hates boredom, seeking for anything to break free from this, and doesn't choose her methods to achieve that. It's a quintessential fun crime. She's a typical troublemaker.

Sheesh...rather than a devil, she's more of an imp or little devil. I feel like I can see black wings fluttering at her back.

"Not to mention, this is one part of my plan to fix your gynophobia." She smiled like a true temptress. "Try your best, my lover-in-position. If you're not careful, you might just die because of blood loss, remember?"

"...Y-Yeah."

Because she glanced up at me, I couldn't help but avert my face. This just isn't fair. When she's sitting in the classroom, she already is plenty of a beauty, but that doesn't have any chance against the current Suzutsuki. That's just how...yeah, cute her face just now was.

"But, it's not as easy." I heard a deep sigh.

...A sigh? Suzutsuki just sighed?

"How should I explain this to Subaru. I can only see this ending badly. She really hates when I head out to have fun."

“.....?”

I failed to understand what she was talking about. The me at that time couldn't hope to realize the reason for Suzutsuki Kanade's melancholy.

Chapter 4: Paradise Summer

Sunday arrived. Almost as if it had been planned ahead of time, the sky was colored in a clear blue with no cloud in sight. Well, even if it was thundering or hailing outside, it wouldn't matter much, looking at our destination—An all-weather leisure establishment.

The greatest charm this has to offer is the indoors aspect after all. It's a heated dome with several pools and other attractions to offer. It's basically a man-made summer paradise. Whether it's spring or actual winter, it's an endless summer here. Like an oasis in the middle of town!

“...Nii-san, you're grinning too much.”

Right as we got out of the train station closest to our destination, Kureha spoke up with a bothered tone.

“I get that you're looking forward to it, but if you keep that expression up, you'll be scouted by the Russian army's parachute squad.”

“Like hell I would. Not like they'd dispatch a scout at such a place.” I said, but confirmed the expression I was making.

Just as my little sister stated, I must have been grinning subconsciously. I mean, can you blame me. This is a date, you know. Although everything is fake about this, I still am meeting my girlfriend on a school-free day. It's a necessary measure to fix my gynophobia, but a date is a date. Not to mention that Suzutsuki is a remarkable beauty, at least on the outside.

How could I, your average high school student, not get excited about this. Especially because I never got to enjoy such an event because of my gynophobia. My excitement is probably bigger than Mt. Fuji at this point. I might just be breaking a world record right now. Somebody contact Guinness! Hahaha!

“Remember why we're here, okay? The goal of today's date is so that

I can get closer to Konoe-senpai, so you better help me out, okay.”

“Yeah, I got it.”

“Do you really...” Kureha pouted, clearly not satisfied.

“Oh yeah, you were on a phone call with Suzutsuki yesterday, right? What were you talking about?”

“Hum? That was a strategy meeting, of course.”

“.....”

I wonder why, I just felt my tension and excitement drop drastically. Also, ever since that conversation up on the rooftop, these two sure got close, huh. It’s honestly pretty terrifying to watch it from the sidelines.

“In fact, I prepared some stuff already.”

“Huh.”

“By the way, I also set up something special in your bag, Nii-san. You can’t open it carelessly.” My little sister grinned.

Urged by this, I opened up the bag I was carrying on my shoulder. I was utterly careless. What if she had set up some pipe bomb in there?

“Ah! Wait, Nii-san! There’s no meaning to opening your bag if Konoe-senpai isn’t around!”

I ignored the panicking Kureha, and searched through my own bag. There, I spotted something that shouldn’t be in there, below some other stuff. What is this? Judging from the size, it should be a magazine...Oh, it sure is. To confirm what kind of magazine it was, I pulled it out of my bag—Only to be greeted by a porn magazine. Not to mention that it was one volume of the secret collection I was hiding in my room.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!?” While screaming, I panicked and stuffed that object into the nearby trash bin.

“Wah, you’re so cruel, Nii-san! I went out of my way to prepare that earlier!”

“Shut up! What are you putting in other people’s bags!?”

It seems like she selfishly rummaged through my room. I call that a violation of privacy. Not to mention that she probably saw my other stuff as well. Ahh, I want to die.

“Ehhh? What would have been better then? Some maid stuff?”

“Stop! Don’t reveal your brother’s interests in public!”

“I was planning on showing that magazine to Konoe-senpai and scream ‘Look how much of a pervert Nii-san is! See! Cat ears! It’s cat ears!’, you know.”

“Do you plan on ending my social life or something!?”

“Urk...I was hoping to show Konoe-senpai that you actually have a thing for girls...Onee-sama and I took so long to come up with that...” Kureha showed a dejected reaction.

...I was too naive. Thinking about it, we’re talking about a Suzutsuki and Kureha tag-team, nothing good could ever come out of that.

“But, don’t think that this is the end, okay. I still have some other plans.” I could feel devilish fighting intent from Kureha’s eyes.

...Scary. Putting together her ability to act and endurance with Suzutsuki’s brains, I can’t even fathom what they would do. It seems like I really should be working on some countermeasures. At this rate, no matter how many retorts I throw in there, they’ll be coming up with something new for each and every one. I can already see myself dying from the stress.

Then, I should just form a tag-team of my own. If we can make this a 2v2, we’ll at least have an equal ground.

A few minutes after we departed from the train station, we spotted the familiar backs of two people, who stood in front of the leisure land’s entrance—Konoe and Suzutsuki. They seemed to be talking

about something themselves, not catching on to our arrival. Alright, let's get this mission started.

First, a friendly greeting is up. Towards who? Konoe, of course. I don't think they're conspiring, but if I even lose her, then it'll be a solid 3v1 against me. That would be the greatest possible enjoyment for Suzutsuki...and absolute hell for me. That is something I need to avoid at all costs...!

"Yo, Konoe." I tried to muster up the most friendly smile in my repertoire, and tapped Konoe on her shoulder.

In my young naivety, I expected to get back a response along the lines of 'Yo, Jirou. Good weather we're having today'. However, as if to betray my expectations—

"Mugh!?"

Something was stuffed inside my mouth. It was a black, solid, and metallic object. From my view, it looked like a muzzle—A gun. Clearly, possession of such an object was highly illegal, and breaking several laws probably.

"....."

Um, what is this? Some toy gun? Maybe some joke? But, her face looks quite serious despite that...

"Don't move. Any light movement, and I'll shoot." Konoe glared at me, as she had her finger on the trigger.

Confirming my terrified face, Konoe let out a sigh.

"Jirou, don't just carelessly stand behind me. You might end up with holes."

She put away the gun like it's nothing. I however was still frozen stiff from the shock, my mouth in the exact same position, even without the gun.

"U-Um, Konoe-san..."

“Hm? What’s up?”

“T-That...”

“Ah, you also think it’s small? I’m a bit worried to only have such a tiny gun with me. I would have preferred to take one with more penetrating power with me...”

“No! I’m asking where you even got something dangerous and highly illegal like that from!” I finally got a grip, and loudly retorted.

“Rest assured. This is just a gas gun for self-protection. Not the real deal.”

Konoe spun the gun in her hand like she was part of a cowboy western stage play, and stuffed it into her bag. Oh, right, I guess she can’t bring an actual gun with her.

“However, it’s a modified type, so if I hit some vital spots, it can kill a human just fine.”

“So you’re clearly violating gun laws! Why do you even have that with you!?”

“What are you talking about? When thinking about objects you desperately need on a trip, you need a phone, handkerchief, and a gun. That is common sense for a butler.”

“I don’t see how that is related to being a butler!?”

That sounds like military knowledge rather. Are you planning on taking a hike in a conflict zone?

“More importantly, Jirou...you best be careful.”

“About what now?”

“You never know where the enemy may be hiding.”

“Enemy...you...”

I looked around us. All I could see were families and couples who

came here to the leisure land. Nothing suspicious to see, really. If anything, it looked like your average Sunday.

“If several armed enemies were to appear, I have to focus everything on protecting the young lady. I’m sorry to say this, but please try to protect yourself.” With a gaze as sharp as a blade, Subaru-sama observed her surroundings.

Honestly speaking, she stood out way too much. She clearly didn’t look like your average visitor. Not to mention that she’s emitting clear killing intent, her fingers on her gun.

“...Hey, Suzutsuki.” I called out to her in a volume where Konoe shouldn’t be able to hear us.

“What is it, Jirou-kun?”

“Isn’t she...acting off today?”

“She sure is. But, it’s the same as always.”

“The same?”

“She always acts like this when we’re outside. She really hates when I go somewhere outside except to school. Keeps saying how dangerous it is.”

“...But, were you not alone at that manga cafe before?”

Back then, Konoe was with me at the game center. During that time, Suzutsuki should have been alone...

“I had another servant with me at the time. Generally speaking, I’m forbidden to go outside alone. That’s how it’s been decided.”

“Decided...”

I heard about that before. She must be talking about her family’s decisions. But, even if she’s being protected, isn’t this going too far? Konoe’s ready to kill anybody who’s the least bit suspicious.

“Well, leaving that aside, let’s enjoy ourselves today. I somehow

managed to convince Subaru to come here, so we need to make this worth it.” Suzutsuki said, as if to throw in a change of mood. “Don’t you agree, Kureha-chan? Don’t be so nervous.”

“Y-Yes, Onee-sama.” Kureha gave a response, as she still stood behind me...Oh man, she’s as stiff as a robot. “K-Ko...Konoe-senpai...L-Let’s...get along for today...”

Now hold up, what is this? She’s using me as a training partner whenever she feels like it, but now she acts like a normal girl? Is this the power of love? Even that Kureha looks more grown-up now. But, at least that should be fine for now.

I feel bad for Kureha, but with how nervous she is, it’ll take some time until she can actually get along with Konoe. I guess I don’t have to worry about them ending up in this kind of relationship today. That being said, I can’t let down my guard just yet. After all, the person I relied on the most, Konoe, can be the most destructive as well. The situation is moving towards the pattern I had feared. Namely, three idiots vs one straight-man. A nightmare. Feel like I watched the birth of King Ghidorah¹ happen in front of me. Help me, Godzilla.

“So then, let’s go, shall we. It’s a waste of time to just stand around here.”

With Suzutsuki’s guidance, we walked inside the leisure land. We were greeted by a large lobby, and definitely with a new interior design after it’s renewal. After making it through the entrance, we exchanged our tickets for a one-day free pass, and headed to the changing rooms.

Naturally, boys and girls were split here. Hence, we decided to meet up after we finished changing. If I just make it through this, a summer heaven is waiting for me. Just thinking about that, I felt motivated again. My mind really is simple, I guess. Also, I always enjoyed a bit of swimming. No, I might actually really like it. Gotta change and quickly go for a swim, yeah.

Brimming with excitement, I was about to walk into the changing room—when something grabbed the sleeve of my shirt. Turning

around, I spotted Konoe, like she was grabbing the sleeve of her mother's shirt when wanting something in the supermarket. It might just be my imagination, but I really thought she was blushing.

"J-Jirou..."

"What? Did you forget something?"

"W-Well...the thing is..."

She grew silent, blushing all the way up to her ears. I wonder, maybe she's feeling sick? Or so I thought, but then—I remembered something crucial. Konoe's a girl.

"....."

I stood frozen stiff. What...should we do about this? Now that I think about it, when we're always changing for P.E, Konoe's never with us in the classroom. She must be hiding somewhere to not be seen while she's changing. However, now she has no place to hide, except the changing room ahead of us.

"...Alright. I'll pull you along, so you close your eyes, got it?" She nodded.

Thus, we both set foot into the demon lord's castle. Naturally, the inside was filled with naked men, reaching a point where I'd rather not depict it here. Like I was a guide dog for blind people, I brought Konoe to the shower inside the changing room. As long as she keeps the curtains closed, nobody can see inside. It's weird, creating a separate changing room inside an already existing changing room. Also, although it pains me to say it, I most definitely cannot peek at her changing. I do treasure my life, see.

Several minutes later, Konoe opened the curtains, and stepped outside the shower. Naturally, she wasn't wearing a swimsuit, but rather an orange hoodie with pants reaching down to her knees.



Since I finished changing fairly quickly myself, I only had to put my belongings into a locker and move together. I accepted Konoe's bag to put it into my locker as well, when I realized that her bag was fairly heavy. Wondering what she was hiding, I slightly opened it, and found guns, stun guns, handguns...Well, it's all for safety, I guess. Though, if someone were to say this, she'd be regarded as a terrorist no doubt.

“...Hm?”

There, a bit of a doubt filled my head, as I searched through Konoe's bag. I mean, that doubt existed ever since I first looked into it, but how do I say this...it feels like something is missing. Despite holding so many objects for self-defence, there's something much more crucial not inside—that's the feeling that was plaguing me.

“...Well, whatever.” I muttered, and shook off this doubt.

It probably wasn't that big of a deal. Not to mention that we most definitely won't be needing anything that is inside this bag. After Konoe and I stuffed our belongings in our lockers, we left the changing room. I suddenly feel so exhausted.

“You're quite late.” Right as we stepped outside, I heard Suzutsuki's voice. “You weren't doing anything indecent in there, were you?”

“Of course not. You don't even know what I—” That's as far as I spoke, only to freeze up.

Standing in front of me was Suzutsuki, wearing a swimsuit—A bikini to be precise, colored black like her hair. It's pretty much about what I expected, but that doesn't mean it was any less destructive. She really possessed an overwhelmingly stylish figure. She had proportions where it counted, but a slim waist and thighs. I wonder what she's eating to get such a figure.

Next to her stood Kureha. As for her...well, I don't think I should be commenting on that, to be honest. I mean, she's cute. Yep. She's wearing a deep red bikini, which looks just fine on her, but standing next to that...monster...I just can't help but give her a condescending gaze. After all, her body...

“Nii-san, are you thinking anything rude by any chance?” She glared at me.

She's got good sense, if nothing else. I feel like I'd create some dangerous event without a warning flag if I agreed right here, so I directed my gaze towards the pool. Seriously, this thing's massive. That's what you'd expect from an indoor establishment like this. The

inside of the establishment was comfortably warm, with sunlight shining down on the glass ceiling.

The pool even has a water slide attached to it, with a wave pool right next to it, creating the feeling of being in the open sea. It looked like I found myself in the middle of a tropical summer. Made me feel like I was in the southern area of the globe. Despite that, probably because it wasn't high summer yet, not too many people filled the place. It's just about right that you don't have to worry about others.

"Ah...um...Konoe-senpai..." Kureha started fidgeting, and called out to Konoe. "Your swimsuit looks wonderful on you. You're very cool."

"Ah, your swimsuit is cute as well."

"Ehhh! N-No, um...cute, it's really not..." Kureha blushed furiously, and looked down.

I don't know why, but...Watching her like this filled me with a complicated feeling. I guess that she still is a girl after all. If possible, I'd like her to be this girly at home as well.

"So...if you don't mind, how do we go for a swim together? I'm actually not the best swimmer...so I was hoping you could teach me..."

Stop lying. You're especially good at swimming. Pretty sure you can even dive for a solid 50m. I don't know if this is from Suzutsuki again, but you're clearly trying to appeal as the weak and fragile girl again.

"I don't particularly mind, but..." Konoe glanced over at Suzutsuki.

She must be worried about the safety of her master.

"It's fine, Subaru. If push comes to shove, I'll have Jirou-kun protect me, so don't worry and go have fun."

"...Understood. If you say that, then I shall."

Before I could even say anything, the conversation ended. Up, what do you mean by 'If push comes to shove'? Are they keeping piranhas

here at this pool or something?

“Jirou, I’m putting my trust in you.” Konoe left behind a few words, and walked towards the pool with Kureha.

Even if you tell me that...I’m happy about your trust, but what should I protect her from, huh?

“Fufu, you don’t need to make such a complicated expression. She’s just a bit of a worrywart.”

“Just a bit...is it?”

It felt like she was worrying about you being abducted, you know. It’s not like we received a Lupin-esque report-of-crime.

“Well, there’s also this entire location.”

“Huh? You came here before or something?”

“Indeed. One time when we were still children. Though, this place wasn’t as flashy back then.” Suzutsuki narrowed her eyes, as she continued with a nostalgic tone. “This sure takes me back. A lot of stuff happened back then.”

“A lot of stuff...What, did you get abducted or something?”

I was planning to joke a bit, but Suzutsuki stayed silent...Hey now, what’s that silence for? That makes it sound like you actually were...

“That’s right, when we were both children still, Subaru and I got abducted when we played around here.”

“...Eh?”

I seriously was hoping for that to be another distasteful lie, but it seems like that wasn’t the case. The proof for that was in Suzutsuki’s expression, as there was no glimmer of a joke to be found.

“I don’t even remember how many years ago that happened. We were careless, and then got caught.”

“Careless, does that really...”

“Who knows? All I remember is that they were holding us at ransom. Well, the incident was resolved right away, with the criminals being caught, and the two of us freed. That being said, this doesn’t change the fact that we really got abducted. The reason I’m so limited when it comes to leaving the house, that’s why.”

“So, the reason why Konoe’s so on edge today...”

“She must have been wary of what happened here before. Not to mention that Subaru changed, all because of that incident.”

“Changed?”

Why? Wasn’t that incident resolved?

“I’m sure that Subaru feels responsible for what happened. That she’s at fault for my abduction. That—she couldn’t protect her master, and failed as a butler.”

“That’s just ridiculous...”

No, we’re talking about Konoe, who feels so much pride and duty in being Suzutsuki’s butler. Seeing this happen must be an unfathomable shock for her.

“Ever since that incident, the relationship between me and Subaru ended up stiff and awkward. You must have seen the two of us at school, right. We’re like that even at home. Subaru might still be feeling guilty, which is why she tries not to talk too much with me.”

“.....”

“However, I want us to get over this rift, and become closer again. Like we had been in the past.”

Now that she mentioned it, Konoe called Suzutsuki ‘Kana-chan’ before, right. I can’t even imagine how close they must have been... before that incident. They must have been very good friends at the very least.

“So, the reason we came here today was for Konoe to go back to how she used to be?”

“Fufu, who knows? But...”

It's not that simple—Suzutsuki whispered after.

“Jirou-kun, just as you have a weakness called gynophobia, Subaru has something similar. And, this is a decisive weakness despite being my butler.”

“Decisive...”

Oh yeah, she mentioned that she sucked at cooking...Well, I guess that isn't it. I doubt being unable to cook is related to protecting Suzutsuki.

“If she can conquer that, she might be able to regain some of her confidence. And then, we can go back to how we were before...”

“...Suzutsuki...”

“Alright, that's enough of that. Let's go for a swim ourselves. We shouldn't waste our limited time here.” She returned to the usual Suzutsuki, as she walked towards the pool. “Come on, no spacing out. Today, you are my lover, right?”

With natural movement, she wrapped her arms around mine—Wait a second!? Her chest! I can feel that soft sensation strong enough to be counted as a nuclear weapon, directly hitting my arm!

“Are you okay? You're suddenly quite pale in the face.” Suzutsuki said, clinging to my arm even stronger.

...Terrifying. This woman is definitely enjoying my suffering.

“You don't have to be so terrified. This is just the prologue, you know. If we don't proceed aggressively in regards to your treatment, it probably won't ever get better.” Suzutsuki said with a smile, pulling me along.

I should have confirmed the location of the doctor here at this place.

With these thoughts in mind, I could only curse my carelessness, and get pulled along by my fake girlfriend.

♀ × ♂

Since we spent most of the morning enjoying our time swimming, we decided to check out some attractions in this place. Well, that's what I prefer. After all, the number of my nosebleeds in the morning reached double digits. Suzutsuki is a terrifying human being. She's like a vampire, how much more of my blood does she want to see?

Despite this area being entirely indoors, there's several attractions here they offer, and according to Suzutsuki, the biggest one would be the haunted house. You could even enter there while wearing a swimsuit, so after eating lunch, we all decided to go there together...

"...The heck is this." I was left shocked.

'The Silent Sheep and Its Pleasant Allies².'

These were the words written on a billboard in front of the aforementioned haunted house, using blood-red letters.

"Oh my, do you know about this?"

"Well..."

The Silent Sheep...to think it would appear in such a situation again. I really would have rather not run into it again. Even now, I keep thinking that maybe that thing cursed me back at the game center.

The outside of this attraction looked similar to an abandoned hospital, decorated with all these deformed sheeps. As before, their mouths were red, like they were perfect copies. I don't know if this is popular right now, but I wouldn't be surprised if they started a lawsuit because of this.

"Hey...maybe we should call it quits here?"

"Why? Are you bad with scary stuff?"

"Not necessarily..."

I really can't deal with it, looking at the character ahead of me. It feels surreal, and ominous. The entire title is weird. How does that thing have pleasant allies?

"Urk...I'm pretty bad with it myself." Kureha grew pale, and clung to Suzutsuki.

Oh yeah, she never could deal with horror and occult stuff. Saying that she can't win against something with an actual physical body. Well, that's very much like her.

"But...if Konoe-senpai is going to do it, then..."

"....."

I had a bad premonition about this, and looked at my side. There, I spotted Konoe practically stare at all these eerie sheeps. Damn, she totally became a fan, huh. Seeing no other choice, we lined up in front of the haunted house, with Konoe as the head of the group. Possibly to not create much boredom, they had built this area in a way that would let us see the exit, and enjoy the reactions of the other visitors.

However, I was losing a bit of confidence hearing people scream such as 'Eeeek, I'll get cursed!' or 'Save me! It won't leave my mind!' or 'It's coming! That thing is coming! You're all done for, hahaha!', and so on. There was even a girl who had to be carried out with a stretcher. Then again, the warning towards people with heart illnesses was probably a warning enough.

"Awa...awawa..." Kureha clung to Suzutsuki even stronger, shaking furiously.

I can't blame her. Several other customers even retired after lining up.

"Kureha-chan, maybe you should just give up." Suzutsuki whispered into the pale Kureha's ears.

Yeah, I agree. She might never come out again at this rate.

"I'll go with you, okay? So, Jirou-kun, have some fun with Subaru,

will you.”

“Alright, got it.....Wait, hold on! Why can’t I just leave as well!?”

“Come on, you’re a boy, so put up with it. Or, are you some kind of Chicken-kun that can’t even deal with something like this?”

“Urk! Y-You...!”

“If I’m wrong, then go on ahead. We’ll be waiting at the store we ate lunch at.” She quickly left behind these words, grabbed Kureha’s hand, and stepped out of the line.

Urk, I really have no more room to back out of this, do I. I feel like I’ll have nightmares for the next three days, but it’s still better than being called chicken. Even I have a small ounce of pride left in me.

However, right when it was about to be our turn, one of the employees used the speakers to announce that this attraction had been cancelled. Apparently, a couple had ended up lost inside the haunted house, and employees were currently searching for them. This development sounds like it could come out of a B horror movie. They better not have been munched up just yet.

“Urk...just a bit more, and we would have made it inside...” Konoe seemed to be regretting this fact, but I was genuinely relieved.

The other customers around us apparently felt the same, as they practically ran away from that spot. Thanks to that, we decided to group up with Suzutsuki and Kureha again.

“Oh yeah, how were things in the morning? You were together with Kureha the entire time, right?” As we were heading to the place we ate lunch at, I asked Konoe who walked next to me.

Of course I’d be curious. I doubt Kureha and Konoe’s relationship progressed rapidly, but there’s the what-if.

“It was fun. It’s been a while since I got to play with a fellow girl.” Konoe spoke with a happy expression. “That girl...Kureha-chan is cheerful, and always happy. You two must be pretty close, right?”

“Something like that. Leaving aside the fact that I’m her punching bag, we’re on fairly good terms.”

“...I’m jealous. I’m not that close with anybody from my family.” A shadow appeared on her face.

She might be fighting a lot with her family.

“The thing is, I got into a dispute with my father yesterday.”

“Really? But, there must have been some reason, right?”

A child wouldn’t fight with their parents just for nothing.

“Honestly, I don’t know why he got so angry. He said he’d cut the body to pieces and all...”

“That...is pretty scary.”

Or rather, is it even safe to let her go back home? Tear her up and all...In my family, it was as normal as saying ‘Thanks for the food’, but for an average family?

“I don’t know why my father would want to do something like that to you, Jirou.”

“...Eh?”

“Bring that four-eyed bastard to me! I’ll cut him to pieces!—He screamed. For your safety, I better try and make up with him soon.”

“H-Hold on a second! Why is your old man out for blood like that!?”

Makes no sense, what did I do?

“Don’t ask me. I just told him about what happened on the day we met.”

“The day we met?”

“Yup, when you pushed me down in the science room, touched my breasts, and had that nosebleed.”

“Why did you tell him that!? Of course he’d get the wrong idea!”

Can’t blame him for getting angry. Alright, no matter what happens in my life, I definitely cannot ever meet Konoe’s old man. He will definitely drag me to the police at best, and send me to my grave at worst.

Right as we were talking about that, we arrived in front of the wave pool. This pool recreates what it would be like to swim in the ocean, and even your feet feel like you’re walking on a sandy beach. If we pass by here, we’ll reunite with Suzutsuki and Kureha.

“Hey, Jirou. That over there...isn’t that a human?” Konoe pointed towards the pool.

When I traced that direction, I spotted a small shadow in the back of the wave pool, sometimes floating up, sometimes sinking...Wait. Aren’t they drowning?

“B-Big trouble! We need to call an attendant!” Konoe looked around, but could not find such a person.

This establishment is fairly big after all. Out of pure bad luck, that person ended up in a dead angle. Even worse is that it was a small child drowning.

“Konoe! You search for an attendant and bring them here!” I said, and stuffed my glasses into the pocket of my swimming trunks.

The distance was roughly 30 meters away, so I might be able to do it.

“Wait, Jirou! I should go and save—”

Before Konoe could finish her words, I jumped into the pool. As my nose was tickled by the chlor, I moved through the water. Might not look like it, but I’m pretty confident in my swimming skill. When I was still younger, and got in a fight with Kureha, I was thrown off a bridge and was forced to swim through a cold river. There’s some waves hitting my face from time to time, but it’s nothing too hard to fight against.

“Hey, are you okay!?” I embraced the child’s body, screaming.

I could see a kickboard near us. I guess they came here with that, but lost grip on it because of the waves. Luckily, with my height, I could stand on the ground, so all I had to do was walk towards the side of the pool—

“...Wha?”

On the way back to the wall, I realized something. The water around me was colored crimson red.

“Why...”

It took me two seconds of confusion to understand what was going on. My nose was bleeding, turning the water around me red as blood.

“.....”

In shock, I looked down at the child in my arms. There, I spotted a young girl, probably in the early years of grade school, wearing a school swimsuit.

“S-Save me!”

She must have been panicking, as she clung to my neck. I could feel a girl’s softness rubbing along my skin.

“Gah!” I only barely managed to keep my consciousness connected to my body.

Damn it...what bad fortune is this! It’s a grade school student! A grade school girl wearing a school swimsuit! Shit! Even getting this reaction from such a young girl...Just how much of a chicken bastard am I...!

“—Urk!”

As I started to feel dizzy, I forced myself to walk towards the side of the pool. Crap, the blood isn’t stopping. It’s like I’m in one of those shark movies. Maybe I shouldn’t have eaten that lever and spinach yesterday. I planned to use it as a countermeasure for today, but that clearly backfired.

I started losing strength in my legs. My body was slowly sinking deeper, my eyesight growing blurry...

“Jirooooooooo!”

From somewhere, I heard a voice call my name. A silhouette entered my field of view. Right as I realized who that was—my consciousness faded.

♀ × ♂

“Say, Kinjirou, how do you feel about your own name?”

The scent of medicine filled the sickroom. Sitting on top of the bed, I was asked by my old man. His face was thin, and devoid of much energy. At birth, his body had always been weak, his heart in an especially bad condition, but he somehow managed to live on until now. However, five years after I was born—the doctor said that a surgery was needed. The surgery had a success rate of 50%. Basically, it was between life and death.

And, that very day was also the fateful day of the surgery. Despite this possibly being the last conversation I could have with my own father, he asked me a stupid question like that.

“It’s lame.”

“You moron, it’s the name I gave you, so don’t call it lame.” He hit me on the head.

It didn’t hurt at all. This made sense of course, as a punch with such frail arms wouldn’t hurt. Even so, I held my head, saying ‘Ouchies!’ because I somehow felt like I needed to. In response, my old man grinned, and seemed proud about something.

“Listen, there’s an important meaning in your name. It’s not just some antiquated nonsense.”

“So it is old fashioned after all.”

“Now now, just be quiet and listen. Do you know *Stand By Me*?”

After thinking about it for a bit, I responded with ‘A relative of Fernand³’, to which my old man started laughing so much he almost suffocated. I grew even more worried.

“Not that. *Stand By Me* basically means ‘Stay at my side’.”

“Side of what?”

“It means that you should stay close to the person saying it. How about it, sounds romantic, right?”

“...I don’t get it.”

“Haha, well, that makes sense. I guess the hurdle might be too high for some five-year old brat.”

Of course. I was at an age where I couldn’t even write my own name. I’m sure that my old man must have been aware of that, and yet decided to continue.

“Listen, Kinjiro. The *kin* in your name is written with the kanji for ‘close’ or ‘near⁴’. Basically, I want you to become a man that can be told ‘Stand by me’ by someone.”

“Who?”

“Who knows? I’m sure that this someone will be precious to you. Your mother, Kureha, or someone you have yet to know. Become a man that will make them ask you to stay with them. That’s the meaning behind your name. Hella cool, right?”

“...Well, a bit.”

“Hahaha! You don’t get it at all!”

Something must have been funny, as my old man burst out laughing again.

“Become stronger, Kinjiro. Since you’re mine and your mother’s child, you definitely can. And once you’re strong enough, protect those important to you. Promise me. Stand By Me. This is a promise between Sakamachi Jirou and Sakamachi Kinjiro.”

“...Okay, I got it.”

Naturally, I had absolutely no idea, but I felt like I needed to nod along there. Back at the time, it was my dream to become Ultraman, so I probably just wanted to get stronger, but despite being a child, I desperately tried to understand.

Though, in the end...I'm sorry, old man, I still don't understand what you were trying to tell me. Stand By Me. The meaning of those final words you left me behind...Seriously, why did you have to go out with these words?

♀ × ♂

I woke up from what felt like an old, distant dream. I narrowed my eyes at the piercing light, seeing the sky beyond the glass ceiling. It seems like I'm lying sideways on a bench near the pool.

“Thank god, you're awake.” I heard an alto voice above my head.

It's Konoe. Ahh, I see. I jumped into the pool to save that child...Man, I really don't want to remember that. I lost consciousness while carrying that girl, huh. Looking at the time, I must have been out cold for at least ten minutes.

“You okay, Jirou?”

“Yeah...I just got to meet my deceased old man again.” I answered while putting on my glasses, which earned me a dubious gaze from Konoe.

“Please, stop with those jokes. I was worried this entire time. Not to mention...”

“Not to mention?”

“...N-No, forget about it. It's nothing.” For some reason, Konoe put her fingers on her lips, and started blushing.

Did she do something while I was sleeping...Maybe some doodles on my face? Right as I touched my face to confirm that, two people that seemed to be the child's parents came towards me, lowering their

heads. Ahh, so embarrassing. This is the first time an adult gave me such serious gratitude. Not to mention that Konoe was the one who saved that girl, including me.

“Ahh, how pathetic. I tried to save her, but I couldn’t do anything.” I watched the girl walk away while holding her parents’ hands, and muttered to myself.

“That’s not true. You brought her to the corner of the pool, and saved her even without my help.”

“I wonder.”

“You sure did. If anything, I can’t help but admire how far you made it, despite having that girl cling to you like that.”

“...I guess.”

I mean, if I collapsed right then and there, people would definitely get the wrong idea. A high school student suffered a nosebleed while trying to save a drowning grade school girl, and ended up drowning. I could already see the article in the newspaper. That is one thing I would love to avoid. If there was a ranking on the worst possible deaths in this world, this one would take rock-bottom.

You did great. Although you got a nosebleed from a young girl clinging to you, you definitely managed to save her. That’s something worth praising you for.

“...”

That’s crazy, it doesn’t sound admirable at all. Especially the part of me getting a nosebleed. Try to put out this story in newspapers, I’d get picked up by a cop car.

“You risked your own life for the sake of a young girl, that fact doesn’t change, Jirou.”

“Can you stop it already? You’re making it sound like I’m some lolicon.”

“...Eh? You’re not?”

“What kind of reaction is that!? Why are you shocked to hear that I’m not!?”

If anything, I’m the one shocked now. I most definitely do not have such interests.

“Huh? But, Jirou...you watch all the grade school students go to school every morning, while you’re naked, right?”

“Excuse you!? Can you not make up random stories that would hurt my standing in society!?”

“Then what about the part of you saying ‘Haaa haaa, Kureha-tan, let’s wash each other’s backs’ every night in your sleep?”

“What kind of terrifying sleep-talking is that!? I don’t have such radical dreams!”

“Kureha came asking me for advice, saying ‘Please help me! Nii-san won’t stop sniffing my socks!’...”

“...Alright, you’re prohibited from meeting Kureha for a while. I’ll have to teach her some manners.”

“Teach her some manners...So you’re treating her like a pet.”

“Am not!”

“What about putting a collar with chains attached on at least three times a week...”

“I’m most definitely not. I don’t enjoy this kind of domestic violence.”

“...Fufu, what are you talking about, Jirou. Kureha is the one who puts it around your neck, right?”

“Why me!?”

“I mean, it’s you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean!? It’s her fault, right!? This is all just her nonsense, isn’t it!?”

That damn little sister of mine...Does she want to turn me into a weirdo that badly? Also, Suzutsuki is definitely behind all of that. I can see the threads of her plot spinning around this situation.

“It’s fine, I know that you’re not that kind of person, Jirou.”

“Thank god...”

“You can be proud of yourself, Silver Killer.”

“I thought we went over this already!?” I was gasping for air.

All this retorting led me to be out of breath. Konoe watched me struggle like that, and let out a snicker.

“Fufu, this is fun. How long has it been since I enjoyed a conversation like this?”

“Really now...Glad at least one of us is having fun.”

We continued to talk like that, and eventually reached the table we previously had eaten lunch at. However...

“...Huh?”

Surprisingly enough, Suzutsuki and Kureha were nowhere to be found. Weird, they said they’d be waiting here. Maybe they headed to the toilet instead?

“—I messed up.” The butler next to me muttered. “What a blunder. How could I have left the young lady alone for such a long time...” Konoe’s face grew pale.

I don’t think there’s a reason to be this concerned. My little sister is with her, so she’d be plenty enough of a bodyguard if it really came down to it. They must be around somewhere, so I looked around—only for someone to call out to me. It was the old lady from the food store.

“Are you Sakamachi-san by any chance?”

“...? Yes, that’s me.”

“Thank god. Your friends told me to give this to you.”

“Eh?”

As I was left confused, the old lady gave me a black mobile phone. It's a brand I haven't seen before, so it might be Suzutsuki's. But, did she bring her phone with her?

“No, this one doesn't belong to the young lady.”

“Really? Then, whose...” I was interrupted mid-sentence because the phone started ringing.

It seemed to be receiving a phone call. Not to mention that it was a video call. But, no name could be seen.

“Let's answer the call,” Konoe said, and tapped on the accept button.

In doing so, an odd scene appeared on the screen. A dog...no, it was more of a wolf. A shadow stood in front of the phone's camera, wearing a black suit with a wolf's mask. It resembled a mask you'd use in movies, with an almost eerie and wild expression on. Makes me feel like I walked into a gossick horror movie.

‘Test, test, hello hello? Can you hear me?’

A voice came from the phone's speaker. They seemed to be using a voice changer, as it was impossible to tell if we were dealing with a man or a woman.

“We can. Who are you?” Konoe asked with a sharp tone in her voice.

As if to answer that voice, the wolf in the screen—laughed.

‘Hyahahaha! What, aren't you pretty calm about this? Your precious, oh so precious master's gone. Right, Konoe Subaru.’

With a twisted and discomfoting voice, the wolf dropped Konoe's name...Hey, wait a second. Why does he know that Suzutsuki isn't here?

“...Let me ask you one more time. Who are you?” Konoe somehow

managed to keep her calm, and repeated the question.

‘Alright, let me give you an answer. I’ll only tell you once, so you best be listening closely, Butler-kun. I am—’

—A kidnapper.

Once again, the wolf on the screen let out a loud and roaring laughter. As for me, I couldn’t even hope to gasp what was about to start.

1 A monster like Godzilla

2 Might be a reference to [this](#)

3 The original says gasorinstutando, which means patrol station.

4 近

Chapter 5: Wolf and Sheep

“A kidnapper!?”

‘That’s right, Jirou-kun. I took your little sister and classmate with me.’

The screen changed to some dimly-illuminated room. There, I spotted Suzutsuki and—

“Kureha!”

Neither of them were moving an inch. Maybe they were unconscious...or even...

‘It’s fine. They’re just sleeping. I told you, I’m a kidnapper, not a killer.’

The screen returned to show the wolf.

‘Well, there’s no guarantee that this will be the case in the near future.’

“...You bastard!”

“Calm down, Jirou. Don’t give in to their provocation.”

“...!”

Don’t joke with me. My little sister was abducted, how can I stay calm about that.

“Answer me. What’s your goal with this?”

‘Phew~ That’s what I expect from you, Butler-kun. You sure are calm about this. Or are you just indifferent? Do you not care about your master?’

“Shut up. Touch these two with just a finger, and you won’t have any more left once I’m done with you.” Konoe formed a fist.

Seems like I'm not the only one who is on edge right now. Some low-blow joke like that really ain't doing it in such a situation.

'Eek, so scary~ If you did that, then I won't be able to ever play rock paper scissors again~ Ah, how about we decide it with that, then? If you win, I'll free those two. If I win, I'll instead kill—'

"I told you to shut up. You didn't abduct the two just to play around like an idiot, did you...What's your goal...No, your demand."

'Hyahahahaha! Demand! Demand, you say! Are you sure? Then, let me tell you. The great me has only one request. Let's have some fun together, shall we?'

...They're bat-shit crazy. It didn't take long for me to understand that. That bastard's got a screw loose.

'You have ten minutes to come meet me at the nearby attraction that's in construction. That'll be the location for our battle. Of course, no police or security, because that'll lead to your game over. Also, same stuff if you take some of those dangerous tools inside your bag with you.'

"...! Wha...how do you..." I swallowed my breath.

Why do they know about the contents of Konoe's bag?

'How? That's simple, Jirou-kun. I've been following you this entire time, even before you walked in here.'

It's a planned-out crime—is what the wolf said, and laughed.

'It's been a long time. I was waiting for you to come back here. I really needed to get some revenge against that dear Butler-kun over there. And this time, I won't mess up.'

—This time? Don't tell me...is this one of the kidnappers Suzutsuki told me about? She mentioned that all of them got captured, but maybe one managed to escape.

"Got it. So, me going there alone is fine, right?"

“...!? K-Konoe!” I subconsciously screamed. “Don’t be stupid! That’s clearly a trap! Not to mention that Kureha was kidnapped as well! I’ll come with—”

“Jirou, this is my responsibility. I’ll definitely save Kureha-chan, so let me go there alone. Not to mention...”

I can’t let you put yourself in so much danger—Konoe said with no hesitation.

...Don’t joke with me. Are you telling me to sit here and wait? Not doing anything, just praying? Even though my little sister...someone important to me is in danger...!?

‘Kyahahahaha! How nice! That is youth, that is friendship! I don’t personally mind which one of you two is coming over. Whether it’s Butler-kun or Jirou-kun, the game won’t change. However—Will you actually make it here, Konoe Subaru?’ The wolf man took out an object that shone in a strong silver.

It was a knife. The blade had a length of about 20cm, with a somewhat sinister design. Upon seeing this object, Konoe’s expression was distorted in shock.

“Y-You...!”

‘Hm? What, it’s not anything odd, right? I looked into you folks, and came up with some countermeasures, see.’

“...!”

‘Now, I guess this should do it for my declaration of war. I hope you make it here soon. Be safe, my dear Butler-kun.’ The person cut the call with a provocative tone.

Even so, Konoe tightly grasped the phone in her hand. However, her fingers were quivering nonetheless.

“Konoe...?” I grew worried, and called out her name.

However, no response came. No, more than that...

“H-Hey!?”

Like a puppet that had lost its strings to keep it standing, Konoe just collapsed. Right before her body dropped to the ground, I somehow managed to support her with both of my arms.

“Ah, Jirou...” With pale, quivering lips, she spoke up. “D-Don’t... worry about it. I was just feeling a bit dizzy...” She tried her best to stand up, reassuring me with a meek voice.

No matter how I looked at it, this wasn’t anything normal. Konoe almost lost her strength again, looking like she was going to pass out any second. What is this, it’s the exact same as me. She’s got her own phobia. She might not suffer from a nosebleed like I am, but she’s got similar symptoms at least. That’s right, it happened immediately after she saw that guy’s knife.

“...!” I felt my heart shake.

That’s right, Suzutsuki told me...about this weakness. She said that Konoe has a weakness similar to my gynophobia. A decisive weakness that will impact her work as a butler. And looking at Konoe’s current symptoms...If I had to guess...

“Konoe, say...are you afraid of...knives?” I blurted out the conclusion I came up with.

Thinking about it, something was off since the very beginning.

‘I can’t cook for the life of me.’

That’s what Konoe told me before. It’s not that she’s bad, she literally can’t. Why? Why was there a need to phrase it that way? Rather than not being able to cook, she can’t use the tools needed for it. A kitchen knife is still a knife with a blade. And, this sense of discomfort I felt back in the changing room...

When I went rummaging through Konoe’s bag, with all these tools, a single object was nowhere to be found—Indeed, a blade. Despite having a gas gun and stun gun and whatnot in there, there were no signs of knives or blades. That’s right, Konoe Subaru...

“...It’s just as you said, Jirou. I suffer from aichmophobia.” She spoke with a heavy tone, like she confessed her own sins.

I knew it. That is the weakness Suzutsuki spoke of. So, the reason for that was...

“Something must have happened when you were kidnapped here before, right? That incident probably created your aichmophobia.”

It’s a simple deduction, but maybe she was threatened with a knife before. That might have led to that phobia of hers, and ever since then...

“Yeah, it’s a pathetic story. Ever since then, I was afraid of blades and knives...Let alone touching, just by looking at it, I would lose all strength in my body.” Even while explaining that, Konoe’s body was shaking.

It’s like she suffered an interior wound. I fully understand how she feels. Even if your brain is telling you that you’re totally fine, your body thinks otherwise. As I have a phobia of my own, I understand how Konoe feels painfully well.

“.....”

Wait a second. So the reason she so easily agreed in helping my phobia...is because she has one of her own? She wanted to help me, because I was suffering just like she was...?

“Sorry, Jirou, I’m okay now.” She brushed off my hand, and stood on wobbly feet.

What an idiot she is. How are you okay?

“Jirou...I’m a failure as a butler.”

“.....”

“On top of not being a boy, I have this fear of knives...I guess I shouldn’t be working as a butler if I can’t even fully protect my master. But, even so...I want to stay the young lady’s butler.” Konoe tried to walk ahead, looking like she was about to collapse any

second.

She's a sheep. She looks and acts like a sheep, terrified of the hungry big and bad wolf. Quivering in fear at its sinister fangs, she tries her best to fight back. All simply to protect her own master.

“—Konoe.” I calmly called out to her back.

“Don't worry about it, Jirou. I'll definitely save your little sister. That's why, just wait he—” There, Konoe grew silent.

Or rather, I had her grow silent...by using my right fist that I buried deep into her abdomen.

“J-Jirou...?” Konoe's expression distorted in agony.

Her translucent eyes were filled with doubt, and worry.

“I'm sorry, Konoe. I can't give you a butler ticket, but I'll listen to whatever you have to say after this. So please, just get some rest.”

Another punch followed—this time with clear intent to render her unconscious. Mom taught me this technique a long time ago, but I'm glad it worked out. It didn't take long for Konoe's body to end up limb, so I carefully put it down at the pool side.

...I wonder. Why did I do that? I can't even properly explain it myself. If there was one reason, then...

“Stand By Me.....huh.”

For some reason, it felt like I could hear my old man's voice. That's pretty much the only reason as well. Thinking about it, I felt the same way back when I tried to save Konoe in the science room, or jumped into the pool to save that young girl.

—I have to protect them.

That's the thought filling my head...Well, in the end it's just an abrupt crime.

“Seriously, nothing makes sense...” I muttered towards the blue sky

beyond the glass ceiling.

Now then...I guess it's time to meet that kidnapper.

♀ × ♂

I walked past the 'Entry prohibited' sign like it was nothing, and headed towards the location pointed out to me, the attraction currently in construction. They must have started working on that from the beginning of summer, as the inside was filled with building materials and other necessities.

I walked down the dark path illuminated by the emergency lights, and reached an unrefined room the size of a classroom. Darkness reigned inside the room. With no windows, only the small lights inside revealed me—and that guy.

"Welcome to my attraction. I've been waiting for you, Jirou-kun. Then again, I really did not expect you to be the one to come here." The wolf mask wearing a black suit spoke up.

I most certainly was dealing with the person who kidnapped Kureha and Suzutsuki. Anxiety and irritation, these two feelings were mixing inside my heart. I looked around, but could not find those two anywhere.

"No need to worry, they're behind this door I'm standing in front of. Still, weren't you cool just now. Almost like you're some manga protagonist." The wolf laughed.

Must have been watching us just now. Well, that's about to be expected.

"Say, why did you do that? You had the choice of coming here together, right?" The mask asked with a mechanical and indifferent, yet oddly curious voice.

...Like hell I know. I want to know the same thing. Sure enough, we could have come here together, and I bet Konoe herself could have handled the situation better than I can. But—I didn't want that. I didn't want Konoe to put herself in such danger. Not to mention...

“I was pissed at you.”

I had some dark, eerie feeling start to rise inside my chest. It would not allow me to forgive this bastard. This guy kidnapped Kureha and Suzutsuki, and made Konoe feel like she's some failure...I can't forgive him.

“Really now. Well, even if you're here, the contents of the game won't change at all, so no worries.”

—You just have to win against me. That's all.

“—So it'll be a brawl.”

That makes things easier. Much more than asking me to solve some math problems. Honestly speaking, I was terrified that we'd have some battle of the brains here.

“If you win, I'll release those two. If you lose, then I'll have you wait here with the other two. You three can wait for Butler-kun to get here, okay?”

“.....”

So even now, they plan on waiting for Konoe to get here. I guess their real goal was Konoe after all. I'm just some way to pass the time, huh. But, if we're really doing this with the rules they decided on, then I can win. I wasn't raised in that family for nothing. I might not be on Kureha's level, but I definitely have some fighting skills. Well, they were forcefully drilled into me by Mom though.

Not to mention, now that I've come all this way, I can't afford to lose. I have a responsibility that does not allow me to lose. I'll win, and take back the two—

“Alright, only one more thing. I'll tell you what's most important now.” The wolf raised one finger. “—Don't die, will you.”

That was the signal for us to start. Surprisingly enough, a single step of the wolf reached for a solid five meters, closing the distance between us in an instant.

“!”

His speed...and more than that, his motion towards an attack, it happened so fast. A black arm lunged at me, a straight right fist. I can't evade that. The second I judged that, a hard fist rammed right into my body.

“Ugh!”

Because of the impact, I was blown backwards. I reflexively tried to guard with both of my arms, but my field of view still shook from the pain...This might be pretty bad. Even though I was punched only once, this overwhelming power is no joke. It felt like I was hit by one of Kureha's elbow drops. They're strong. I don't want to believe it, but they might be able to stand their ground against Mom...!

“—Get down from your high horse, you shitty brat.”

For a second, it felt like I heard a more dry and husky voice compared to before, but I wasn't given much time to think about it.

“Guha!?”

I received a body blow like a bullet, and the fierce pain crawling up my flank left me unable to breathe. I was about to falter on one knee, but somehow managed to keep standing. That's right, I can't allow myself to go down just yet.

“Huh, I'm impressed. Being able to keep standing after that blow.”

Just like at first, I heard a calm and provocative tone. In an attempt to answer that, I laughed.

“Ha...haha. Of course. I'm not going down that easily—I lived through much worse before!” I said, and threw a punch right at the wolf's torso.

My fist stabbed right into their body. That punch used up all my might. However—

“Hyahahaha!” I heard a mechanical burst of laughter.

...You have to be kidding me. They didn't even flinch. Did that not work?

“Geh...!?”

Almost like a return for my attack, the wolf's left fist grated my rib. Following that came a knee kick. What a crazy combination. An impact I felt all the way to my back sunk into my solar plexus.

“Jirou-kun, if you still want to continue after this, we'll have to change the name of the game.”

As I was quivering in pain and agony, the wolf taunted me yet again with a calm tone.

“As for the new name—How about **Biohazard**¹? And, I'll have to fight for my life against the dear Zombie-kun in front of me!”

Right after that announcement, a left uppercut rammed into my jaw, lifting up my body entirely. Oh crap...I'm feeling limb. It feels like I put on glasses that didn't fit my eyesight, as my field of view was twisting and turning. With that one attack, he absolutely plastered my brain. Now, I won't even be able to defend—

“...!”

Another impact shook my body. He hit me again somewhere. The inside of my mouth was full with the taste of blood. My entire body hurt all over, as dizziness and the urge to vomit plagued me. My knees lost their strength, and as I sank to the floor—

“Guah!?”

A merciless kick hammered into my face right as I collapsed forward. It was like a Series A free kick. If my head was a ball, it would have landed in the goal. As I was flung backwards, the wolf stomped on my stomach without a moment's delay. Like I was a cockroach that appeared in the kitchen, an endless shower of kicks hit my body.

“.....!”

That friggin hurts. I can feel my intestines about to shoot out of my

mouth. I'll be killed. My field of view was colored crimson red from the blood gushing down my eyelids. I was wounded all over, and would probably pass out if I relaxed myself for even a second. If I were to stand up again, I'll get killed for sure. But, even so—

“Heh...haha.”

When the endless storm of kicks and stomps ended, I let out a faint snicker.

“This...this is nothing. Compared to my family's happy get-togethers, this feels like I'm having a picnic beneath the blue sky...” I tried to act tough as I moved my mouth, and stood up.

I could feel the blood running down my face. Ahh, there's cracks in my glasses. Now I need to buy a new pair later.

“...!”

As if that wolf was waiting for me to get up, another attack followed. I felt a pain like my body was torn apart. An onslaught of attacks ensued. It was utter one-sided violence. Just standing took everything from me. I bet it would be easier if I just lost consciousness. But...I can't do that. I can't accept that.

“I'll...get up as many times as it takes, you shit head.”

Biohazard? Fight's on. Let me show you a smile for the camera. If you want me to be a zombie, then why don't I go all out. Yeah, that's right. This is nothing. Nothing at all. Compared to what I suffered through in my family, this is nothing.

“Hey, did you ever get woken up with an elbow drop instead of a normal good morning?”

“.....”

“Did you ever get to eat a brain buster just because you left behind some food you disliked on the plate? Were you ever playing house with your little sister back in kindergarten, only for your Achilles tendon to be sliced up?”

“.....”

“Did you pass out while being looked down upon by your family, only to wake up in the ICU hospital room? Did you ever accidentally walk in on your little sister changing, only to be brought to a near-death state?”

You probably didn’t—I added, and took a step forward. How could they? You normally wouldn’t experience these things in a normal family. The only person who went through such a hell in this world... is me, I bet.

So, don’t underestimate me. I’ve been hit and hurt by my mother and little sister for years, and still made it all the way here. That’s why I won’t lose because of something like this. I can’t afford to lose. If I did, then I can’t protect anybody. Not Suzutsuki, not Kureha, not Konoe... If I lost consciousness now, I won’t be able to protect them. I need to become stronger for that.

“Alright, it’s time to finish this game, what do you say?” A mechanical voice announced such.

In the wolf’s hand—was a knife. It looked sharp enough to cut through skin with the slightest touch. And, the tip was pointed at me.

“I guess even you won’t get up again if I cut up your arms and legs, right? I really didn’t want to take it this far, but...I guess I can’t help it.”

First is your right hand—the knife soared down at me in a sight line.

Ahh...crap. I can’t muster up any more strength to dodge. But, I can’t let it end like this. Even if my neck is the only part of my body that can move, I’ll try to bite him. I don’t have any restraint in that. Whatever it takes, I won’t go back down here.

The bright shine of the knife approached me. Right as it was close to stab into my flesh—

“I’ve made you wait, Jirou!”

A translucent alto voice filled the room. A small palm intercepted the

knife, as a smirk was on her face.

“K-Konoe...”

Without a doubt, I was looking at Konoe Subaru, the butler of Suzutsuki Kanade.



“Jirou, I’ll be taking over now, so you go take a rest.”

Drops of blood fell to the ground. She must have cut her palm because she stopped the knife. Even so, she did not let go under any circumstances.

“Hyahahahahaha! Good morning, Butler-kun. Aren’t you late.” The wolf let go of the knife, and distanced himself. “Ahh, no entrance fee needed, okay. This is a rematch. For you, and me. And sadly, that wasn’t my only knife.”

Exactly as he had stated, the wolf took out another knife in similar shape to the one before, and readied it.

“Hm? Not shaking anymore? The last time we met here, you were crying and shaking in fear, right? I threatened to stab you with the knife. You were like a terrified lamb, your legs about to give up.”

“...Yeah, you’re not wrong. But—”

It was like she was saying that things were different now. She picked up the knife on the floor, and directed her transparent pupils directly at the wolf, as if she was stabbing them.

“I—” She opened her mouth, like she wanted to tell herself.

Her hand was faintly quivering. This past trauma, inducing that phobia of knives, must be urging her even now to give up and run away. But even so, she stood her ground, and was ready to fight. Simply to protect the people important to her.

“I—am a butler.” She said, and tightly grasped the knife in her hand. “That’s why...I’m not scared of some knife...!” She took a determined posture.

Even now, she looked like a sheep. A small lamb terrified of the big bad wolf. Facing those sinister fangs, she tries her hardest to fight back. Normally, a single bite would spell the end of it all. Without being able to raise even a scream, she will have the life choked out of her. The strong devour the weak. That is the rule of this world. But, even so.

—There might just be one sheep who manages to kill a wolf.

Upset. Inferiors overthrowing their superiors. Despair turns cowards courageous. Whatever word doesn't matter. There should be a sheep baring its fangs at a wolf. There should be several sheep who are ready to jump at a wolf's throat. There—should be a sheep raring to break a wolf's fangs. Some stupid fantasy like that honestly doesn't sound too bad. That's why...

"Sorry about this, Subaru-sama." I tried my best to keep my consciousness connected. "I'll leave the rest to you."

Hearing my words, Konoe gave a brief 'Leave it to me'. That—was the signal to begin the battle. Like a fired bullet, the wolf rushed towards Konoe with the knife in hand. It was more of a sprint. A dash to kill whatever was in front of him. The knife shone like bare fangs. However, Konoe didn't try to evade that. On the contrary...

"!?" I swallowed my breath.

Konoe jumped towards the approaching blade of the knife, as her body danced through the air. Surprisingly enough, she used the knife as a stepping stool.

"Ahhhhhhh!" A roar rang out.

After using the knife as such, Konoe's body—turned. Almost like she wanted to purposefully show off her back. She sped up solely to raise the impact of her kick. Indeed, this was a kick. I knew of this action. When I ate the full force of Mom's attack, I lost consciousness in an instant: A rolling sobat.

Her left leg drew a beautiful arc, almost like a claw. And now, this approaching attack directly slammed into the wolf's face...!

".....!"

Without uttering a word, let alone scream, the wolf was blown away by the impact of the kick, and didn't get up again. It seems like he's out cold. It was a perfect, flawless rolling sobat. Seriously...the hell is wrong with her. She finished this battle in a single attack. With a single strike—she tore apart the wolf's throat.

"....."

Ahh...shit. She's so cool. I don't want to admit it, but I kind of understand all the girls going around screaming and calling her 'Cool and awesome'. Subaru-sama, huh...Yea, Konoe right now definitely is cool enough for me to fall for her.

"Konoe, the two are behind that door...!" The second I said that, Konoe started running.

I somehow managed to push up my injured body, heading towards the door. Past there was a small room the size of four tatami mats². Two shadows could be seen on the floor, restrained by handcuffs.

"Kureha!"

I ran towards my little sister...Thank god, she's not hurt. She must have been forced to sleep with some medicine.

"Subaru, Jirou-kun..." Suzutsuki let out a meek voice, as she presumably woke up.

"Young lady..." Konoe gently raised her master up.

Tears started to build up in her eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry. Because...because I wasn't careful enough, I made you and Kureha-chan go through so much. I am...a failure as a butler." She tried her best to form these words with her mouth.

As if to answer that, Suzutsuki showed a gentle smile.

"No, that's not true. You properly protected me, did you not? As your master, I wouldn't fire such an excellent butler like you." She spoke with a peaceful voice.

As if that had been the trigger and final straw, Konoe couldn't hold back her tears any longer. And, with a sobby voice, she called out the name of her master—

"...Kana-chan."

"What's wrong, Subaru."

“Can I...can a useless butler like me stay at your side, Kana-chan?”

“Yes...of course.” Suzutsuki smiled, and ordered her own butler. “I want you to always stay by my side. As a butler...and, as a friend. Serve me for the rest of our lives. That is an order, Subaru.”

“...Yes, I understand, young lady.”

Master and butler, Suzutsuki and Konoe looked at each other, as if to confirm their relationship. Well, I guess that’s about the end of that. Also, can I just go take a nap now? It’s mighty pathetic of me, but I’m starting to reach my limit. Maybe it’s because I could finally sigh in relief, my consciousness is suddenly...

There, I heard a sound resembling clapping behind my back. Turning around, there stood the wolf. The kidnapper that should have been defeated by Konoe was now clapping his hands.

“You...are you still not done...!?” Konoe formed a fist.

However, the wolf did not answer this question. I don’t even hear their lighthearted and provocative voice from before. Instead, the kidnapper slowly took off their mask, revealing their true face. What appeared was a masculine face with a sharp light in their eyes. They possessed a calm expression befitting their large stature and black suit...Possibly being in their later twenties. After he fixed their ruffled-up hair, the man put on glasses.

“Wha—!”

Seeing the face of the man who appeared, Konoe’s mouth opened wide in shock...Eh? What’s that reaction? Rather than dealing with a kidnapper, it felt like she ran into someone she knew in the middle of town...

“T-That...that can’t be...” Konoe’s eyes turned blank, as her mouth opened and closed, unsure of what to say.

The man must have waited for this, as he pushed up his glasses, and

“Subaruuuuuuuuu!”

With an energetic and almost comical voice, unbefitting of his image, the man clung to Konoe. He had the nerve to hug Konoe just like that.....Hey, what kind of development is this. Who is this guy? Why'd he suddenly hug Konoe?

“Ahh, he’s Subaru’s father.” Suzutsuki said with a calm and collected voice.

.....Excuse me? What is she saying, out of the blue like that?

“Konoe Nagare might seem young, but he actually is Subaru’s blood-related father.”

“.....”

“By the way, he is the working butler for the current head of the Suzutsuki Family—namely, my father’s butler.”

“.....”

“And? Shocked?”

“I mean...rather than shocked...”

It all makes sense now. Looking at Suzutsuki’s teasing grind, and Subaru spacing out as she’s passionately embraced by her old man, adding the sleeping Kureha, it all makes sense. I don’t want to believe this, but...

It seems like we were set up. Right as this ridiculous reality popped up in my head, I must have reached my limit, as my consciousness faded to darkness.

1 The Japanese refer to the game series **Resident Evil** as *Biohazard*

2 About 6 square meters

Chapter 6: The Stray Sheep and Chicken Me

A white light tickled my eyes, with an unfamiliar chandelier hanging on the ceiling. Met with this dazzling scenery in front of my eyes, I awakened.

“...Ouch.”

Intense pain made all of my body hurt. Bandages were covering my body. I don’t know who did it, but someone was kind, careful, and thorough with my treatment, and even had me change back to my normal clothes. Well, leaving aside my gratitude for this fact, where is this?

I put on my glasses next to the pillow (which were luckily fixed by someone), pushed up my upper body, and looked around. I saw luxurious furniture with an elegant carpet. It’s like one of those castle rooms that would appear in fairy-tales. I was located in the middle of this, on top of a fluffy bed.

“Yo, finally awake?”

I heard a husky voice coming from the corner of the room. The person had their hair properly styled-up, wearing silver-rimmed glasses—Konoe Nagare. Like a bird of prey, Konoe’s father glared at me.

“How’s it going, your body still hurting, you romcom bastard?”

“Romcom...What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Huh? You pushed down my daughter in an empty science room, touched her breasts, and then got a nosebleed. Only some bastard out of a romcom would experience that kind of thing.” Konoe Nagare’s shoes clacked as he walked along the floor.

Seriously, how young is he? He has to be in his late thirties, but looks

like he is in his twenties. Did he do this thanks to plastic surgery?

“You best be thankful to Kanade-ojousama. If not for her, you would have been sent to the garbage collection at haste. Also, your injuries aren’t that big of a deal, really. No broken bones, so your recovery is coming along just fine.”

“Just fine...Weren’t you the guy who did this to me in the first place?”

Acting like he’s not the fault of this.

“Don’t blame me, the plan was for you to lose consciousness after the first strike. You’re the one at fault for not going down with the first hit. I was forced to hold back in the end.”

“Stop lying. You were definitely hitting me with full force.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I tried my best to hold back the urge of slicing you to pieces. Holding back from killing you was tough work.”

Yeah, I probably won’t ever be able to get along with this guy. That was my very first impression now. Konoe Nagare looked down at me. He wore a black vest with tight pants, together with a stiff necktie. This must be his attire as a butler, but it equally fit him painfully well even without that.

Since he looks like that, I must be at the Suzutsuki Family’s residence right now. As expected, you can tell how rich they are. It’s honestly terrifying.

“...What about Kureha?”

“Rest assured, she’s sleeping in the room next to this. The scenario was for her to not get hurt in the first place.”

“.....”

Scenario, huh. I knew it, it was all just a plot put together by Suzutsuki—It was nothing but a staged kidnapping. As for the reason why they would go through such trouble...

“Hey, can I ask one thing?”

“What? I might listen to your request as long as it’s not ‘Please let me call you Father’, alright?”

“...Why the hell would I call you that? What kind of person do you think I am?”

“An insect clinging to my beloved daughter. If there was some pesticide that would work against you, I’d make sure to spray that all over the world.”

You damn helicopter parent. It seems like he really can’t stand my guts. Well, not like I care, I feel the exact same way. How could I respect an adult who emits such clear evil intent.

“Old man, even if I somehow ended up marrying Konoe, I definitely will never call you father. Old fart is plenty for you.”

“Fight’s on, you shitty brat. I’d rather die than have you call me father. And, even if the world were to end, you will never get my adorable Subaru.”

Konoe Nagare...No, that old man just nonchalantly flicked me off. When I retaliated by pointing my thumb down, he just gave me an annoyed ‘Hmpf’.

“I’ll be perfectly honest, I hate your guts.”

“No worries, the feeling’s mutual.”

“Aren’t you confident, you shitty brat.”

“You’re running out of words, you damn helicopter parent.”

Sparks were flying between the two of us. I wanted to ask about the whole incident at the leisure land, but I can’t be bothered now. I’m more invested in our battle now. A surprise attack is best, as whoever strikes first, wins...I need to finish this in one fell swoop.

“You two seem to be getting along quite well. Would you mind letting me join in?”

As we spent our time glaring at each other, the door to the room opened, and a familiar voice reached my ears—It's Suzutsuki. She was wearing the same clothes I met her in this morning.

"Nagare, you can leave now."

"Understood, Kanade-ojousama."

The old fart devotedly lowered his head towards Suzutsuki, and left the room. Hm, that's a butler for you, he will act humble and polite in front of his master at least.

"He's not a bad person, you know. Just loses his overview on things a bit once Subaru is involved."

"That's a bit, huh...I don't know what you're seeing, but he's clearly crazy over his own daughter. At this rate, he'll never let her get married."

I've seen him cling to his own daughter like he's crazy. I feel like that old guy is way too protective. Can't even imagine having someone as clingy as him as a father.

"But, Nagare kind of resembles you, Jirou-kun."

"...Wha?"

What is that woman saying? He and I are supposed to be similar? What other common ground do we have except that we wear glasses?

"You sure do. About the part where you really treasure your family. Well, Nagare only has Subaru as his family, so he's just a tad bit more protective than you are."

"Only Konoe?"

Oh yeah, what about her mother...

"Subaru's mother passed away when she was five years old. Her body had always been fragile, so Subaru's birth put a large strain on her body..."

“.....”

Add to that that Konoe doesn't have any siblings either. Makes sense that she couldn't give birth to any children in that state. Even though I bet she wanted to leave behind a boy as well.

“Thinking about it, that was around the time Subaru grew obsessed with becoming my butler. The people from my family urged Nagare to get married again, but Subaru started crying and begged them not to, saying ‘I don't need a new Mom!’, you see. She must have been scared that her own mother's existence would vanish entirely.”

—I need to be the young lady's butler no matter what.

That's what Konoe told me back when we talked in the infirmary... Just as Suzutsuki said, she might have wanted to protect the existence of her mother by continuing to be a butler. That's why she's that desperate...

“But—reality wasn't as kind as that.” She showed a beturbed tone. “Because of that abduction happening at the leisure island, Subaru became afraid of knives. Ever since then, those two feelings were colliding inside of her. For one, her desire to continue being my butler, and at the same time, her insecurity and worry if she was even allowed to be my butler in the first place.”

Her feelings of wanting to honor her mother by continuing to be a butler, and her guilt of not being able to protect her master because of her phobia...What a dilemma, seriously. And, she's been caught between these two all this time?

“We tried our hardest to fix that phobia of hers, but nothing worked. Honestly speaking, I lost count on how many times I was about to tell her to quit.”

However, now she feels glad that she didn't. That's what I picked up from Suzutsuki's gaze.

“Your encounter with Subaru was the greatest chance for us. By being around you, someone who suffers from a phobia as well, she might be able to overcome hers—is what we thought.”

“That’s why...you had Konoe help fix my phobia.”

“Exactly. However, it didn’t quite work out after all. I’m sure there was a slight change after she started helping, but her phobia of knives didn’t improve much. That’s why—we decided on a different approach.”

“Which was the kidnapping incident today...”

“Hyahahaha! That’s correct, Jirou-kun.” I heard the voice of the wolf again.

Looking over, Suzutsuki held a small machine in front of her mouth, as she started talking.

...So that vexing voice came from that woman after all...If I had to guess, that mask probably had some speaker implemented into it, and the room they were locked in had surveillance cameras, watching my every movement. I guess that was necessary so that Konoe wouldn’t figure out that the kidnapper was actually that old fart.

“As expected, the plan worked out. Her friends and master were put into danger, which is what forced her to overcome her own phobia. Well, it’s not all gone at this point, but that definitely was an important first step.”

“...Not to mention that your relationship with Konoe got fixed as well.”

For crying out loud, how manipulative can she be. She used both me and Kureha as much as she wanted, all simply to fix Konoe’s phobia.

“That’s right. I really...am thankful to you two. Because of you, Subaru can stay as my butler.” Suzutsuki showed a polite bow, as she gave me her gratitude.

...Shit. So we’ve been dancing on the top of her palm this entire time. That sure is annoying. If she’d just told me, I would have helped.

“You really can’t complain about her old man. When it comes to Konoe, you’re not looking at the people around you either.” I was practically complaining with a sharp tone.

However, she instead just let out a snicker.

“You’re right. I love Subaru after all.”

“...Huh?”

Love? That sure is an odd way to phrase things. It’s like she’s actually seeing Subaru as a romantic interest...

“It’s true, Subaru was my first love.”

“.....”

.....I mean, what is this person saying? You’re telling me to just accept that? She’s saying it with an oddly serious expression, but that has to be acting, right. Yeah, this wolf girl wouldn’t just throw in a random coming-out, right...

“Oh, since you’re here already, why don’t you stay for dinner? I will call for you once the preparations are completed.” Suzutsuki said, and walked towards the door without even waiting for my response.

However, right before she stepped outside, she turned around.

“Jirou-kun, we’ll be trying our hardest to make sure your gynophobia gets fixed. If not, then I wouldn’t be able to call it even. Thanks to you, Subaru can continue working as my butler. And, more than anything...”

—*Thank you for becoming her friend.*

She smiled, and left the room...That’s not fair. This is clearly a red card. She’s making my heart race endlessly. She was hella cute. Showing me such a carefree expression...Waah, what should I do? Something precious inside of me will break.

And there, as I was agonizing over this attack, someone knocked on the door.

“I’m coming in, Jirou.” Konoe’s alto voice reached me even through the door.

She was wearing a similar butler's uniform like that old fart before. Yeah, she looks pretty dignified. I knew it'd look much better on her than on that old guy.....Wait a second? Why are there...red spots on her uniform? I can see some red dots here and there scattered on her white shirt, looking like blood...

"Ah, this? It's not that big of a deal. I just had my father take some notes."

"Eh?"

"No need to worry, I avenged you, Jirou."

"...Huh."

"Also, I told him 'I hate you, father!' right up to his face."

"....."

Um, did she do that to make up for the fact that I was beaten to a pulp? I mean, I'm happy about that, I guess, but now I'm starting to feel a bit worried about that old fart. He won't hang himself just because his daughter said that to his face, right.

"More importantly, does your body still hurt, Jirou?"

"Well, here and there. But, I'm used to this, so I'll be better in no time."

I always recovered fairly quickly from my injuries. It's a blessing in disguise because of my family. Still, did Konoe come over here because she was worried about me? As I thought, she really is a good person.

"I see. I'm glad to hear that. If your injuries were too grave, you wouldn't be able to fulfill your promise."

"Promise?"

"Yeah, you said 'I'll do whatever you want me to after this', right?"
Konoe showed a somewhat invigorating smile.

.....Oh crap. I'm getting the shivers. I mean, I did say that, but...that was just in the heat of the moment, so you don't have to take it this seriously...!

"A-Ahahaha, don't be like that, Konoe, that was just some verbal promise..."

"Konoe'? What are you talking about, Jirou." She flashed a bright smile. "Right now, I'm not 'Konoe', I'm 'young lady', right. You are currently under absolute control of mine, so don't forget that."

"....."

Um, you're joking right, Konoe-san? I was really hoping for that, but the atmosphere she gave off seemed to fully disagree with me. This is bad, her eyes are serious. Damn it, to think I'd sign my own death because of such a stupid phrase...!

"I-I understand, my lady." Pressed by the fear, I could only do as I was told.

"Alright, that's better. With this, you don't have any right to disobey me, understand."

"Yes...that is correct, young lady."

"Meaning, you're prepared to bear with any kind of pain I might be inflicting on you, right?"

Eeeeeek! Don't say that with such a straight face! What do you mean by any kind of pain!? Do you hold that much of a grudge against me!?

"What is it? Are you? Or are you not?"

"I am! I am ready to accept whatever awaits me!" I frantically nodded along.

I mean, how can I say NO in this kind of situation? Yes yes yes, it is. Ahh, dear god, please save me. At least don't make her torture me.

"Then, here I come. Don't move."

“...Y-Yes.”

Ahhhhh, she’s definitely going to punch meeee! Or so I thought, but as if to betray my expectations, a different sensation enveloped my body. I felt something soft touching my skin, together with the sweet fragrance of flowers tickling my nose. When I carefully opened my eyes, I spotted Konoe Subaru right in front of me. Konoe was clinging to my body.

“K-Konoe...?”

I subconsciously called her like I always would, but no retort came back. In all honesty, this was more impactful than being hit directly. Konoe—had her face buried in my chest, sobbing.

“...Idiot.” She muttered with a quivering voice. “I-I was scared... Really, really scared...”

“.....”

Scared. Yeah, she must be talking about the whole knife thing. Of course, that makes perfect sense. Konoe suffered from a big trauma after all. Even if she did it to protect Suzutsuki, standing her ground against that trauma must have been hard for her.

“...Don’t cry, Konoe.” I tried my best to cheer her up. “You managed to protect Suzutsuki, didn’t you? You’re not a failure anymore. Even your fear of knives, you’ve started to conquer it, right.”

There, Konoe raised her head. Her eyes, wet from her tears, glared at me.

“That’s not it.”

“...Eh?”

Met with these words, I was left baffled. That’s not it? What? So she wasn’t scared because of the knife?

“You’re wrong! Absolutely wrong! That’s not what I was scared about! What I really was terrified of was...!”

—*That you will disappear from my side, Jirou.*

That's what she said, as large grains of tears ran down her cheeks.

"Back when...I woke up next to the pool, do you know how I felt? What do you think I went through when I realized you went to save the other two alone, leaving me behind?"

"....."

"I was terrified. Full of fear. Thinking that you'd leave me behind, thinking that I won't ever be able to see you again. W-What...what if you got stabbed by that knife while I was sleeping...!"

"....."

"W-When I was thinking that, I got scared...Worried that the first friend I ever got at school would die without me being able to do anything...Just the thought of that...!"

"...Konoe." I gently embraced her shaking back.

Something told me that I had to do that.

"Sorry, it was my fault."

"...I-Idiot. Even if you apologize...I definitely won't forgive you...!"

Her hair was graceful as it shook, and even her acting tough seemed weak. Sitting in front of me wasn't the strong and cool Subaru-sama who fought the big bad wolf while dealing with her trauma. She was just a normal girl. Small, slender, and fragile enough that I was worried about breaking her with my hug.



“Idiot...idiot idiot...” Konoe continued to sob, burying her face in my chest again.

—I want to protect her. That’s what I thought. I want to protect Konoe...protect this girl. But, in order to achieve that, I’m not good enough right now. I’m weak. I’m covered in bandages. I was beaten to a pulp this easily. How weak am I...

“—!”

That's why I need to become stronger. So that she won't have to worry about me...So that she won't ever have to cry again. No matter what danger might come, I'll become strong enough to protect her at my side...

“...Ah.”

I see. I finally understand it, Pops. Those final words you left me behind...Stand By Me. I want you to stay by my side. I need to become a man who will let people precious to me say that. I need to become strong enough to protect the people important to me. I need to be strong enough to be able and say 'I'll protect you, so stay with me'.

“Jirou...” The girl quietly raised her head.

Her face was riddled with tears, her eyes transparent as they reflected my own face. We were at a distance where our lips could touch at any second. Because of her beautiful appearance, I swallowed my breath—and that's when it happened.

“Woah!?”

My field of view suddenly turned red. My nose was bleeding. The red liquid I've been trying hard to keep in all this time...now came gushing out.

“A-Are you okay, Jirou? This is why I asked you if you were okay with pain...” Konoe moved away from me, bringing me tissues.

...Man, right when we had a good atmosphere going...Just, don't treat me like some chicken bastard. I really tried my best to hold back this entire time. But, this is my limit. I mean...you know? I don't think I can ever see Konoe as a man again...

Right as I tried to stop the blood from gushing out of my nose, the door opened at a fearsome speed, with no prior knocking. Wondering what the buzz was about, I turned towards the door, only to spot Kureha.

“A-Are you okay, Konoe-senpai?!” Kureha beautifully ignored me, and instead dashed towards Konoe.

Wow, I really don't feel the love here. Despite me being severely more injured, and bleeding from my nose, she doesn't care.

“I heard from Onee-sama! She said that ‘Jirou-kun might be violating Subaru right about now’, you know! Ah...Konoe-senpai, your eyes are so red...You must have been scared. Let's start a victims' meeting!”

That damn Devil Suzutsuki. Going around lying again. Also, I'm the biggest victim here, so let me join.

“Also, Nii-san! I can't believe you went to seduce Konoe-senpai when I was about because of anemia, despite going out with Onee-sama!”

“...Anemia?”

Ah, I see. That's another of Suzutsuki's lies. So that Kureha doesn't know about this entire plot, she beautifully covered up the truth.

“Calm down, my little sister, you're just being deceived by that woman.”

“H-How cruel! Not even putting trust in your own lover, you're a failure as a human being!”

Hey now, what are you saying while I'm listening? Also, this situation is dangerously bad. Kureha seems ready to hammer a chair on my head. I need to do something...

“Hey, Jirou.”

There, the silent butler spoke up again.

“What was that about you going out with the young lady?”

“...Oh shoot.”

Now that I think about it, we kept the fact of me and Suzutsuki being a fake couple a secret from her, right? Crap, I got a really bad feeling about this.

“Huh...I see, so you and the young lady share this kind of relationship, Jirou...” A voice overflowing with rage tickled my ears.

The air around me froze up. It felt like a cold breeze passed me by inside this room.

“I-I need to kill you right now...To think you would lay your hands on Kana-chan...You need to be removed from this earth before you dare come back to life a second time...!” Konoe had her face cast down, showing an awfully cold smile.

.....I'll be killed. No mistaking it, she's out for blood. The second my body realized this, I jumped off the bed.

“Ah! Nii-san is running away!”

Of course I would! This mansion is haunted! I need to leave as quickly as possible!

“Daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Together with a war cry, I jumped through the window of the room. The sky was colored orange from the setting sun. As I jumped down from the second floor, my downfall was illuminated by the warm sun.

“Ooooooooooh!?”

I was skydiving for about three meters. Albeit being terrified at this unexpected height, I somehow managed to safely land on the ground. The wild grass below acted as a wonderful cushion. Opening up in front of me was a large garden, looking like a wide sports park. Alright, next up is how to actually make it out of this place...!

“Oh my, aren't you quite energetic.”

The second I started running, I heard a voice I would have rather not picked up. Despite being terrified, I turned towards the person who even brought me into this situation in the first place—

“I was waiting for you to jump out of that window, but...I didn't expect things to work out this well.” The devil smiled happily.

This damn plotting wench...! Just how much more does she want to play with me before she's satisfied...!

"Suzutsuki! You...You set me up, right!"

"What a horrible accusation. I just did what I thought would be best."

"Thanks to that, I was about to lose my life!"

That's right, the root of all evil is most definitely this wench. Now that's come to this, I'll keep giving you an earful until the very end, like a B-29. Otherwise, I won't be able to rest in peace.

"Anyway, just come with me!"

"Eh?"

As Suzutsuki gave a baffled reaction, I just grabbed her arm and started running. Of course, only her arm, above her clothes. I don't want to get a nosebleed while running.

"What are you planning on doing? Is this what they call a runaway marriage?"

"As if! You're a hostage! If I tried running just like that, I'd get killed!"

If push comes to shove, I'll use her to buy myself a ticket of freedom. I'm feeling like some villain in a midnight overseas drama. There won't be any car chase happening, will there?

"Well, that's fine and all, but..."

"What?"

"Um...Please don't grab my arm this passionately...This is the first time a man has touched me like this...and it's embarrassing..."

"You say that, after fully enjoying yourself at playing with my body, so don't give me that crap!" I screamed, and ran through the grass.

There, I felt insane pressure run up my back. When I turned around, I

spotted my little sister and classmate, glaring at me like two wild dogs—Kureha and Konoe. That group of two was chasing me, and screamed at the top of their lungs.

“Heeey! Stop right there, Nii-san! I’ll forgive you this once and send you down to hell!”

“So you’re trying to kill me!?”

“Jirouuu! Don’t think you can escape! I’ll use my memory erasing technique one more time on you!”

“I feel like I’ll remember my previous life more than anything!” I tried my best to hold back my urge of screaming in terror, and kept running as fast as I could.

If I get caught now, it’ll be a dead end for me. It’s pretty much like I’m being chased by death itself...!

“Ahaha.” Even as she was being pulled along, Suzutsuki laughed like a child. “Whenever you’re around, it never gets boring. I’m sure it’ll be as enjoyable as this every day.”

“Shut up, you wolf wench! This entire situation happened because of you! Because you keep spurting nonsense...!”

“Oh my, I’m speaking my heart here. For example—the part about Subaru being my first love.”

“Wha—”



When I turned to my side in shock, I spotted the girl sticking out her tongue, as she smiled at me. But, her cheeks were still faintly red..... I give up. Butler, rich lady, and little sister...Thinking that I'll have to spend the next two years like this makes me want to cry. Not even a week ago, I would have never imagined living my life like this...Can I really fix my gynophobia under such circumstances?

“...Damn it, what messed up nonsense.”

But, if there was one thing to say, it would be that my daily life won't be getting boring anytime soon.

“...Alright.” Let me rephrase myself.

Filling my view was the setting sun, illuminating us and the sky with a reddish-orange color. In the midst of this, I screamed at the top of my lungs.

—*Girls really are terrifying!*

Afterword

Nice to meet you, my name is Asano Hajime.

This novel's title 'Mayo Chiki!' is an abbreviation of 'Mayoeru Shitsuji to Chikin na Ore to'. That's why, we're definitely not talking about mayonnaise chicken or any fast food of the sort. Though I agree, MayoChiki sounds like they would be selling this in a convenience store.

Anyway, about this very 'Mayo Chiki!'. As the title suggests, it depicts the story of a butler heroine and a chicken bastard protagonist. Not to mention that the heroine isn't just any butler, but rather wearing male clothing while working as one. On top of that, our protagonist isn't just any chicken bastard, but rather one that ends up with **that** whenever he touches a girl, or is touched. He's an ultra chicken bastard. Adding a rich lady and little sister, the academy chaos is pre-programmed.

Indeed, we're talking about a romcom. This might be an abrupt change of topic, but 'Mayo Chiki!' is actually a romcom written under very specific circumstances. Namely, it was written during my time at a driving school! How does that sound? You probably haven't heard of such an example before, I bet.

Of course, it's not that I was willingly writing it at a driving school. You might ask why I did so either way, but...the problem was the time. I reached the deadline to hand in my manuscript...I sent in this manuscript for the 5th MF Bunko J newcomer light novel contest, and I still remember that I only barely made it in time....Not to mention that my time limit to graduate from driving school was approaching rapidly...

The driving school I was attending had a time limit, and if you didn't graduate during that time, all the expenses would come crashing down on you, so I rushed through everything like I was swimming against the stream back at my hometown's river. Back then, my daily life consisted of thinking about material on the bus on my way to the

driving school early in the morning, writing them down on my notes for university during recess at my driving school, and putting that into my PC once I came home.

What would come first, the deadline, or the day that I won't be able to graduate from driving school? It was a so-called chicken race. Even so, I somehow managed to send in the manuscript in time, and even graduated from my driving school. Adding that my manuscript had been accepted to be turned into a fully-fledged book like this, I guess I am quite lucky. Almost too lucky, I'm quite terrified of tomorrow.

Although it ended up a bit late, I'd like to move on to the thanks. First, my editor Shouji-sama, I've really been in your care. I have yet again understood that creating a single work all on your own is practically impossible. I hope I can be in your care even in the future.

Next, Kikuchi Seiji-sama for providing these wonderful illustrations even during your busy days. I couldn't be more fortunate to receive these beautiful character designs for the characters I developed. I am in your debt.

Following that, the chief-in-editing Misaka-sama, the judge committee who decided to choose my novel, everybody from the editorial department, and everyone who helped in distributing this novel through publishing and selling, I have no words for how grateful I am.

Next, all my educators at the driving school, I'm terribly sorry that I was such a lousy student. Of course, I can't forget about everyone from my circle who helped with the material. Let's go have a drink once we're a bit more open.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to everybody who decided to pick up this book.

Now then, until we meet again, I'll be stepping on the pedal to see how far this ride takes me, so please take care of me.

Asano Hajime

Credits

Translation Group: CClaw Translations

EPUB is done by JLN

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